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# AND PESSIMISM

AND OTHER STUDIES

BY

GEORGE CHAMIER

Bright, caustic, and original disquisitions on some of the most popular subjects of the day, and others of never-failing interest. In the essay on War the author exposes the falsehood and hypocrisy of the plea of National Defence advanced in support of increasing armaments of the most aggressive character. The study on Pessimism throws a new light on that much-misunderstood conception of life. The author has been charged with "dusting our idols," but he does so in a humorous style, and with a gentle and sympathetic hand.

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WAR AND PESSIMISM  
AND OTHER STUDIES

'The News'  
Toronto  
August 1914.

PRINTED BY WATTS AND CO.,  
JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

Kenneth Irving, 1914  
"The News" Reporter  
Toronto, Ont

# WAR AND PESSIMISM

## AND OTHER STUDIES

BY

GEORGE CHAMIER,

AUTHOR OF

"A SOUTH SEA SIREN," "PHILOSOPHER DICK," ETC.

SECOND AND CHEAPER EDITION

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TO MY FRIEND

FREDERICK MILLAR,

WHOSE ADVICE AND APPRECIATION HAVE AIDED  
AND ENCOURAGED ME IN MY LITERARY EFFORTS,  
AND WHO, WHILE DIFFERING FROM ME ON  
CERTAIN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ACTION, HAS  
HEARTILY ENDORSED MY ANTI-PATHY TO RELI-  
GIOUS CANT AND MORAL HYPOCRISY, THIS

VOLUME IS

DEDICATED



## CONTENTS

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	PAGE
THE MORAL ASPECT OF WAR -	1
PESSIMISM -	21
CARLYLE AND HERO-WORSHIP	41
EMERSON ON SELF-RELIANCE	53
SIR THOMAS MORE'S "UTOPIA"	61
RUSKIN'S "FRONDES AGRESTES"	71
IBSEN'S "HADDA GABBLER" -	79
MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS	91
SHAKESPEARE'S " MACBETH "	101
RUSKIN'S " SESAME AND LILIES "	111



## THE MORAL ASPECT OF WAR

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AT the conclusion of his book on the *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* Sir Edward Creasy indulged in a paean of praise over the blessings of peace which had been conferred on Europe for the glorious period of nearly forty years—a peace which was then looked upon, to quote his words, as affording a happy promise of a lasting victory “over selfish prejudices and international feuds, in the great cause of the general promotion of industry and welfare of mankind.”

This was in 1851. I can remember the period, although I was quite a child at the time; and I recall that it was a matter of general congratulation in those days that the age of war was over, and that society had grown much too enlightened and benevolent to tolerate any longer recourse to such a wicked and barbarous method of settling international disputes.

Napoleon III. had but just overthrown the Republic of France, not without black treachery and copious bloodshed, and established himself on the Throne with the glorious announcement, “The Empire is peace.” Not only did his befooled countrymen believe him, but the greater part of Europe acquiesced, and was quite ready to be similarly imposed upon.

A few years later a distinguished writer, in his *History of Civilisation in England*, which caused a sensation at the time, proved to his entire satisfaction that the

intellectual progress of mankind was gradually putting an end to the cruel and demoralising practice of war, which he principally attributed to the benighted ignorance of previous generations.

Looking back complacently over these forty years of undisturbed peace, he confidently predicted a new dispensation in the affairs of men, in which the march of civilisation, hand in hand with the growth of industry and the extension of commerce, would bring about a condition of mutual goodwill, founded upon a better appreciation of mutual interests, among the nations of the world. The Crimean War, which was raging at the time, he did not look upon as inconsistent with his argument, for he considered it a conflict between two semi-barbarous nations that called for the interference of the Great Powers which stood at the head of modern civilisation.

As already remarked, Buckle did not stand alone in this cheerful prognostic; he only shared in the general enthusiasm, and expressed a general hope. Peace and goodwill were in the air—they had become quite the fashion.

The experience of the succeeding forty years has considerably modified this peaceful aspect of things; but many people still cling to the old belief, repeat the old platitudes, and continue to prophesy that the world is fast becoming too intellectual, too sensible to its true interests, and too united in commercial bonds, to submit much longer to the stupid, unjust, and brutal tyranny of the sword.

Peace to all such! I have no intention of arguing the point, for it would carry me much too far. Besides, there is no arguing against a belief in Utopias. I would only remark that there is one branch of knowledge which these amiable enthusiasts are always singularly deficient

in, and which goes a long way towards upsetting their theories—a knowledge of human nature.

It will be interesting to contrast with such speculations a judgment founded upon a lengthy experience, and derived from a keen and practical knowledge of the world; the opinion expressed by one of the foremost military leaders of the age. Judging from the published speeches of the late Count von Moltke, that eminent man had brought himself to look upon war as not only a necessary but also a beneficent agent in the development of civilisation. All nations, according to his view, to be in a healthy and prosperous condition should be thoroughly trained in the art of war, armed at all points, and ready at all times to rely on the force of arms to assert their rights and to accomplish their highest destinies. War to him was not only a noble pursuit, but one calculated to bring out all the latent energies of a people, and to further their best interests. War, indeed, seemed almost to partake of a sacred character in his eyes. The soldier represented his highest ideal of a man.

Nor is such an opinion much to be wondered at, coming from such a quarter. Count von Moltke was pre-eminently a Prussian, but inspired with patriotic ardour in the great cause of German Unity; and he was fully convinced that this object could be obtained only by the predominance of Prussia in the field. His country, indeed, owed everything to her army. From a small and insignificant State of North Germany she had, in the short space of two centuries, sprung to a pre-eminent position, largely increased her territory, and become the arbiter of Europe. And all these magnificent results had been accomplished, not by any moral or intellectual means, but entirely by the force of arms—the irresistible argument of a million bayonets.

It was, therefore, quite natural that the famous general should have looked upon his victorious army as having fulfilled almost a divine mission. From a mere personal point of view he had every reason to be well satisfied with the career of arms, which had raised him to the highest distinction, brought him titles and wealth, and conferred upon him imperishable glory. But the view expressed by the great soldier is also held by multitudes who have in no respect profited by his achievements or shared in his renown. It is held and acted upon by all the Great Powers of Europe; it is the argument to which most people pin their faith, and eventually fall back upon, whatever they may say to the contrary.

The world is governed by force. It is very well to talk grandiloquently about the march of civilisation, the peaceful conquests of science and industry, the bonds of union by friendly commerce, and so on—fine words which are not without their value in times of concord, but which suddenly disappear when angry passions arise, when conflicting interests clash, or race animosities are roused. The same evil influences which set man against man, in the ordinary relations of society, which cause bitter hatred even among members of the same families, that prompt men to acts of violence and cruelty—selfish greed, the lust of power, or the mere love of fighting—prevail with nations equally as with individuals. And the ultimate recourse is always to force. The strong triumph, the weak succumb. Such is the law of nature; such has been the history of the world.

According to Sir Edward Creasy, when the Athenians were remonstrated with on account of the severe exactions they imposed upon their vassal allies, they avowed that their empire was a tyranny, and frankly stated that they solely trusted to force and terror to

uphold it. They appealed to what they called *the eternal law of Nature, that the weak should be coerced by the strong.*

And yet the Athenians were the most civilised people of antiquity—the most intellectually advanced. Moreover, they were as ambitious of extending their dominion as the British are at the present day, and they were as jealous of their commercial interests and as proud of their maritime supremacy as our own glorious nation is now, with all its benevolent principles and high Christian morality.

The world is more than two thousand years older, but there is really not much difference, at any rate in the motives that instigate the actions of men, or the principles on which they act.

It is simply absurd to talk of the intellectual progress of the world putting down the practice of war. On the contrary, some of the shrewdest intellect of the present day is being unremittingly devoted to improving the art of warfare and inventing new engines of destruction. Never before has such a horrible progress been made in infernal machines and methods of killing. We witness the whole of the civilised world resounding with the din of arms, and stimulated to the most strenuous efforts in warlike preparations. The nations of Europe are groaning under the weight of stupendous armaments, which far excel in expense and magnitude anything previously known in the history of mankind.

As to the worldly wisdom of war, that has always depended, and must continue to depend, on results.

To the Germans the conduct of their last great campaign must appear eminently wise, for it gained them all they wanted; but to the French nation that declaration of war was an act of supreme foolishness, which was attended with the most disastrous consequences.

There was no folly about the attack of Japan upon her peaceful and almost defenceless neighbour China. Japan was ready for war. She had just completed her armaments, both on land and sea, and organised on the most approved system. It was highly advisable to try the efficiency of the new force, as soon as a safe opportunity offered. So many thousands of innocent and helpless Chinamen were slaughtered, a rival navy was destroyed, a great amount of booty was obtained, the patriotic enthusiasm of the Japanese was excited, and China had to pay the costs. Where, I ask, does the *folly* of such an action come in? It was morally unjustifiable; it was wicked, but it was highly advantageous to the victors, and that is the way the world looks upon it.

That war is un-Christian is generally admitted among Christian communities, but the admission is so hedged about with provisos and extenuating circumstances that it is practically ineffective. It may be broadly asserted that religion, nowadays, carries no weight where national interests are involved. The English people make a great pretence to religion, and the Holy Bible is still much in evidence in private families; but by general consent it should not be brought into politics. Where, I may ask, did our pious scruples interfere in the Opium War with China—a war that outraged every religious and moral principle, just to suit the greed of our Indian trade?

The beautiful precepts of the Sermon on the Mount are listened to reverently in church, and diligently taught at the Sunday-school—even imparted by our good missionaries to their heathen converts—without reference to *our* practice. Indeed, the idea of applying such exalted sentiments of brotherly love to our dealings with foreign powers, where our interests are

concerned, would be treated with scorn and derision. Moreover, Christianity has been so obscured and distorted in its evolution from primitive teaching and practice that it has lost nearly all its value as a rule of public conduct, although it is still customary to invoke its sacred name, and make loud appeals to heaven, when engaging in the iniquitous business of war.

Of course, there are always excuses ready at hand: the plea of *National Defence* is a good one, and generally available; it admits of being interpreted in various ways, and the Established Churches evidently consider that it is just as easy to hoodwink the Almighty in these matters as it is for the statesman to throw dust in the eyes of the public.

In all Christian communities the profession of arms is held in high esteem—the army has always been beloved and blessed by the Church. In England, especially, the *pious* soldier, when he has reached the rank of a general and killed a great many people, becomes enshrined in a sanctity of his own, and is often regarded by the public as a Christian hero.

It is not so everywhere. In China, for example, the soldier belongs to one of the lowest castes, and the peace-loving people do not relish the idea of becoming “food for powder.” But this, we are told, is a semi-barbarous race, and we are doing our best, with an army of missionaries, to raise it to our higher standard, notwithstanding a haunting fear of the Yellow Peril.

Morally, war is bad, because it transgresses the eternal law of justice, which is the foundation upon which every principle of right and equity rests. Where *might is right* there every moral standard fails. War not only breaks the moral law, but is retrogressive, and hurls humanity backward to a state of savagery and violence from which the main purpose of civilisation has

been to raise it. It is a wicked expedient to gain by brute force what in most cases is quite unjustifiable, and which in nearly all cases could be accomplished by equitable and peaceful methods.

What, then, is the excuse for war? What the apology usually put forward to justify, not only the crime itself, but also the enormous preparations of a warlike character, always increasing the crushing load on the suffering masses?

It is the biggest conventional lie of modern times. It is the lie of lies, known to be a lie by all thinking persons, but everywhere quoted, by common accord, as a self-evident maxim. A lie not to be gainsaid, or even disputed, under pain of craven and disloyal imputations. It is a transparent lie; but, as we know, there are none so blind as those who will not see; and the fighting instincts of mankind are not clear-sighted. It is generally a question of wholesale robbery, and any excuse is good enough for that.

This Stupendous Lie consists in the brazen assertion that the world is armed in the cause of Peace. The accepted maxim, so often quoted, declares that "*the best way to preserve peace is to be well prepared for war.*" Hence these immense armaments; but they are only for peace. Blessed peace is the heartfelt desire of all—"the universal prayer"!

A lovely sentiment, that finds response in every patriotic breast, that fires every pious soul! It is listened to reverently from royal lips; it is loyally echoed in popular assemblies; it is devoutly endorsed by Christian Churches, and accepted as a Gospel truth. It is the Song of Peace that promotes the harmony of the "Concert of the Powers."

The professed intention is excellent—it commends itself to God and to man; but let us glance for a

moment at the manner in which it has been carried into practice, and judge of it by results. For, after all, experience is the only true test of its worth.

And, on this subject, experience will be found to pronounce in a very decided way. History has been described as made up of lies; but there is no doubt whatever about the truth of this melancholy record.

This retrospect need not take us back very far, and I shall touch only upon the events that took place during my moderate lifetime.

After the great convulsion of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, Europe, exhausted by this fearful strain, enjoyed some repose. The accepted watch-word was then "The Balance of Power"; and the balance kept pretty even for a good while. But this could not last—the Peace Programme was to come into force.

Napoleon III. ascended the throne with the glorious motto, "*L'Empire c'est la paix*"; and he set about to prove it.

The first conflict I can remember was the Crimean War. As children we had brightly-coloured plans of the site, with tiny flags attached to pins to mark the positions of the allies and the battle-fields. To the spectators at a distance it was interesting, and even lively; to those engaged in that stupid and useless war it was deadly. For it is generally admitted now that the conflict was disastrous to all parties, and not justified.

The real incentive to Great Britain was jealousy of Russian encroachments, while the Emperor of the French was prompted by personal motives. The result has proved a failure, and the Sick Man showed his appreciation of Christian aid by the horrible Armenian massacres. We incurred the animosity of our former ally, that had always manifested the warmest goodwill towards our country.

Henceforth, for half-a-century, the Russian Bear became our *bête noir*, and kept us in a constant state of foolish unrest. There were many wise and worthy people who, at the time, opposed this war; but their voices were drowned in the din of popular excitement. For whenever the war-trumpet sounds through the land all sense of right and prudence seems to vanish and make way for the worst instincts of an angry crowd. The war-cry has always been popular with the masses. This was strongly exhibited at the start of that deplorable Franco-German War, when the false report of an insult to the French Ambassador acted like a slap in the face to that excitable nation, and drove it mad.

The next step in France's "policy of peace" was an unprovoked attack on Austria, ostensibly to liberate Italy, who has shown scant gratitude for the attempt. This was a war for an "idea," coupled, it must be admitted, to some more tangible advantages. Austria had no business in Italy, where her rule was represented as tyrannical; but France had no moral right or call to turn her out. In any case, there was no question of National Defence involved.

Hardly was this sanguinary affair over than the two great Powers of Germany combined to rob a peaceful and almost defenceless little neighbour of half her territory. This, to Great Britain, appeared an iniquitous transaction, and there was some bluster about going to the rescue; but John Bull only fights where his personal interests are at stake; so he cautiously kept out of it, and poor Denmark was dismembered. Then the two big robbers—as robbers generally do—quarrelled over the plunder, and flew at one another. It was really a fratricidal struggle for supremacy in Germany. Austria once more collapsed, and the northern Power made crushing exactions, annexed several States, and rose at once to

a dominant position. There was no question of National Defence in that war.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, a terrible storm had broken out, which was to inflict disastrous havoc in the New World. The Southern States of North America wanted to separate from the Union. The partnership had become galling, and they determined to sever it ; as they had a natural right to do, for it is preposterous to assert that any compact entered into by independent States must be binding on their descendants for all time. It has been loudly claimed, as a sort of virtuous justification for this barbarous war, that it was waged in the holy cause of the Abolition of Slavery. But such is not the fact. No doubt the institution of slavery produced much of the irritation between the contending parties ; but that question was not to the fore at the commencement of the war, and President Lincoln positively agreed to leave it alone if only the Union was preserved. The North fought desperately for the maintenance of the Union, above all things, because its interests were considered to be vitally involved. The struggle was carried on with shocking barbarity and widespread desolation for a period of four years. The South finally gave way from pure exhaustion —she bled to death. The loss of life in the battle-fields alone has been estimated at 600,000 men, and the cost of the war at about double the amount of the whole British National Debt at that period.

The victors showed great moderation in the hour of triumph ; slavery was abolished at one stroke, but no vindictiveness was exercised on their crushed and ruined brethren. This was wise policy, and helped to heal the wounds which this frightful carnage and sweeping destruction had inflicted. Outwardly there was rapid recovery, and the amazing vitality of those new countries has restored to them greater prosperity than they previously

enjoyed; but after-effects may yet be impending. In any case, the consequences, however favourable, cannot be held to justify such a crime against humanity, unless we adopt that false and detestable doctrine that "the end justifies the means"—a doctrine the most pernicious in all modern history, and which is still professed to cover hideous outrages against society. The moral law, we know, cannot be violated with impunity any more by nations than by individuals; but the retribution may be long delayed. "The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small."

It is important to consider, therefore, from a moral point of view, whether this awful calamity could have been avoided, and it appears evident that a more friendly and peaceful disposition on both sides, together with a policy of mutual concession, would have prevented the fatal appeals to arms. But both parties were furiously intent on fighting to the death, and would listen to no compromise.

Among the South American Republics war became chronic. These turbulent States were constantly massacring people, either through internal dissensions or in savage onslaughts upon one another. In the case of Paraguay it was almost a war of extermination, for the greater part of the male population perished. At the close of the last desperate struggle there remained about one adult man to every three or four women—a state of things that considerably affected social relations—another striking illustration of the moral aspect of war, which is alleged in some quarters to exercise a bracing and elevating influence on mankind.

War for an idea was also exemplified in America about this time, when Napoleon III. vainly tried to found a new empire in Mexico. It was a dismal failure, involving a ruinous policy and much useless bloodshed, while ending

in the pitiable fate of the abandoned Maximilian, who was too weak to fight and too brave to run away. No question of national defence or maintenance of peace in that instance.

Referring back to Europe, the year 1870 found the two greatest military nations in a death grapple without justifiable cause whatever—a murderous conflict solely due to the lust of power, the struggle for supremacy. Both sides had made active preparations for a mortal combat, but always, of course, under hypocritical protestations of mutual goodwill and love of peace ; both were equally guilty of the crime—for a crime it certainly was. Prince Bismarck, of exalted memory, falsified a telegram, and thereby set the blaze going. Any such action, under any other cause, would be held wicked and disreputable ; but it becomes noble and glorious when involving the downfall of an empire and the massacre of hundreds of thousands of victims. Such is the morality of war ! Indeed, it is a noticeable fact that the mere prospect of war extinguishes every sentiment of honest and honourable conduct. Thus, it is now considered quite allowable to take an antagonist unawares —to attack him without a declaration of hostility, as the Japanese did at Port Arthur.

After the collapse of warlike France in 1870 there ensued a period of comparative tranquillity in Europe, but always disturbed by threats and ominous rumours of war, and oppressed with increasing armaments on all sides. It is believed, on good authority, that Germany contemplated a fresh attack on defenceless France without provocation, but simply to crush her utterly, had not Russia interposed. Germany, however, has had to pay dearly for her victory in another way, as the burden of her immense military establishment is most oppressive on the working classes, and the rule of the “ War

Lord " in case of hostilities would be the most absolute tyranny that any people can be called upon to endure.

A few years later Russia invaded the Turkish dominions, ostensibly to protect the Christian vassal States ; but how far any genuine sympathy with religious brotherhood really prompted the movement is open to doubt. Disinterested action in the cause of humanity does not often go far in the warlike conduct of nations, and Russia had other objects in view. She was checked in her victorious march by the jealous action of England, and the Christian communities were left very much at the mercy of the Turks, and suffered accordingly. Meanwhile Christian England, while happily keeping out of European broils, was diligently engaged in other parts of the world in endless little wars to expand her empire, open out new fields for her trade, rectify frontiers, and here and there gobble up a choice morsel to gratify a rather voracious appetite. Concerning the inglorious South African campaign, perhaps the least said the better for our honour and reputation. I have no intention of alluding to the merits of that painful subject.

Great Britain loudly asserted her virtuous, peaceful, and disinterested intentions ; and a revered late Prime Minister publicly declared to the world : " We do not want more territory ; we do not seek for fresh gold-fields," or words to that effect. The world remained decidedly incredulous, but that we attributed to envy. In the sequel we appropriated the gold-fields without much " seeking," and were reluctantly compelled to annex the territory of these two little Republics, that only asked to be let alone and to preserve their hard-won independence. But the inflexible requirements of our imperial policy forced us to annex them. It is melancholy to reflect how often Great Powers, contrary to their high principles and conscientious scruples, are

obliged to absorb smaller States that unfortunately lie in the path. It is the law of the strongest that must be obeyed where national interests are concerned.

Another very modern instance is the seizure of a large slice of China by the Germans on the plea that two of their missionaries had been killed in a riot in that country. This occurred at a time of peace, without any warning, and involved the appropriation of a fine harbour, with a fertile district attached, and a protectorate over a whole province. It was intended to give a heathen people a lesson in Christianity, and was very successful as far as the robbery went; but we should not be surprised that the Celestials do not take kindly to the new religion thus forced upon them.

To resume this sad retrospect. Japan had attacked China to "flesh her sword" on that helpless body, and to secure all the plunder available and the possession of Port Arthur. The Great European Powers made her disgorge that important fortress, which was afterwards occupied "diplomatically" by Russia. Of course, as neither of these two colossal robbers had the slightest right to the place, they afterwards fought furiously for it. Hence the most sanguinary and atrocious conflict of modern times. The death-roll has been computed at several hundred thousand, while the sum of suffering and desolation inflicted on helpless multitudes is incalculable and baffles description. Japan, abetted by Great Britain, secured the prize, and now the most interesting question of the day is to ascertain when and where the next big war is to take place—it is felt to be inevitable—in the interest of peace.

Until a few years ago the United States of America had always repudiated any policy of aggrandisement, and had prudently abstained from meddling in the affairs and quarrels of European nations; but the tendency of

the age lies in another direction, while the modern ideal of the preservation of peace by forcible means could no longer be resisted. The United States caught the contagion, and suddenly provoked Spain because that kingdom could not, it was alleged, suppress a native insurrection in Cuba. This, therefore, was professed to the world as a "humanitarian" war. It also answered another more practical purpose.

It is almost a matter of surprise that those Great Powers, at the head of Christian civilisation, should stoop to flimsy and transparent excuses for their aggressive policy, instead of honestly and boldly admitting the object in view. It is a miserable subterfuge, but it is the regular practice—a profession of rectitude, a sop to tender consciences that want to be deceived, a compliment to religion, a conventional lie that sounds well. Like hyoocrisy, it is a "homage that Vice pays to Virtue." Moreover, it is all the fashion, and has to be accepted with due decorum.

Such is a cursory glance at the war history of the past half-century; but it is sufficient to show the supreme falsehood of these professions of peace in connection with the enormous armaments and preparations for war that have marked the whole period, and which of late years have assumed appalling proportions. Tranquillity and mutual confidence among nations can never be secured by such means.

There is a plausibility in the popular maxim, already quoted, that "the best way to preserve peace is to be well prepared for war"; but it applies only to a grossly selfish and one-sided aspect of the whole question. Of course, any State may gain immunity from attack by superior strength in arms; but this very supremacy is a perpetual intimidation to others, and a bar to the peace of nations. Hence the necessity for alliances and secret compacts for

mutual defence, and the world is kept in constant alarm and defiance.

England glories in her proud motto, "Britannia rules the waves"; but it is clear enough that the arrogant boast is not for defence purposes only: it implies dominion. Other countries have just as much right to the ocean as we have, and may object to be "ruled." Consequently, they are intent on defence, and a crop of Dreadnoughts are springing up in all directions, arousing our jealous fears and causing strenuous efforts for increased armaments.

Germany may rest secure against invasion through her formidable military establishment; but this overbearing force is a serious menace to France, and endangers the peaceful relations of all Europe. The wrong goes on increasing; for the whole system is bad to the core, and can be productive only of further strife. The world is justly alarmed, and from time to time, in spurts of morality, proposes some impracticable scheme to check the evil, which pursues its fatal course all the same.

The proposal for a general disarmament—or, at least, to limit armaments—sounded well, and was hailed by certain factions with delight; but in the spirit of distrust that prevails it proved utterly futile.

Every nation, indeed, embraced the idea with professed enthusiasm, and was willing to promote disarmament—just as far as it suited its particular aims and interests, but no further. Great Britain cordially approved of the principle of limiting military establishments, but when it came to a corresponding reduction in naval forces would have none of it. What else could have been expected under existing conditions?

Arbitration is another panacea, constantly advocated for the settlement of national differences and the prevention of war. It has proved a failure, because it is rarely

available when most wanted. It is founded on the mistaken assumption that the conflicting powers have differences to settle, based on rightful and equitable claims. Thus in most of the great wars I have enumerated there was no *casus belli* that an independent court of arbitration could have been called upon to decide.

When the dispute is not very important, and the parties interested are equally matched or disinclined for a rupture, then an appeal to a tribunal may be successful. Thus, the Alabama claims were peacefully settled, and a pæan of exultation over this amiable method of pacification was indulged in at the time. But when Great Britain was bearing on the Transvaal, mobilising a huge army, and pouring troops on the frontier of that country, although the ostensible contention was a trumpery question as to whether British subjects might become naturalised Boers after five or seven years' residence—a paltry matter of detail which had no real signification whatever—the suggestion to arbitrate was scouted by the dominant Power.

In such a case, as well might the wolf in the fable have been appealed to by the lamb to refer it to arbitration, whether it be devoured or not. Where could arbitration have come in when the United States made war on Spain in a matter that did not concern them, and in which there was no legitimate right to interfere? Under the rule of arbitration could Great Britain be in possession of Gibraltar, Egypt, and most of her colonial possessions; France hold Algeria, Germany all she plundered, Japan Korea, and so on, through the whole map of the globe? The only law acknowledged in these transactions was the Rule of the Strongest. The popular maxim is therefore a glaring falsehood. It should rather read, for all civilised communities, "The

best way to preserve peace is to be peaceable"—to love peace, to strive to maintain it always by fair and honourable means, to overcome selfish greed, the lust of dominion, the aggressive impulse; to follow the golden rule, "Do unto others as ye would that men should do unto you." This may be considered very old and trite; it is only the teaching of virtue and wisdom; but wherever it has been honestly acted upon it has in the past given the happiest results.

According to that true apostle of peace, the late Count Tolstoi, Europe alone kept up a standing army of nine million soldiers, with a reserve force of fifteen millions, at a total cost of one hundred and sixty million of pounds sterling a year. But that estimate was made some years ago, and the numbers have been considerably added to since. And for what purpose? To maintain a harrowing state of *armed truce*. One can call it nothing else, for the true spirit of peace, harmony, and mutual confidence is entirely absent.

It may be surely desirable to consider earnestly, in the interests of suffering humanity, whether this illusory blessing is worth the price now paid for it. The final answer to this vital question must come from the masses—the oppressed masses, that bear this monstrous burden, and groan under it.

It is one of the redeeming features of democracy, with its many foibles and shortcomings, that it is inclined to revolt against this wicked and outrageous imposition. The people alone can throw it off. The pacification of the world can emerge only out of the sufferings of humanity.



## PESSIMISM

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ACCORDING to the prevailing idea, a pessimist is a person who takes a despondent view of things in general ; who is inclined to look at the dark side of life, and to predict evil and bad luck ; a wet-blanket in society ; one who reads the barometer for rain on the eve of a pleasure-party, when all his friends are praying for fine weather ; a sort of Doctor *Tant Pis*, who shakes his head ominously at all "the ills that flesh is heir to," and will not answer for the consequences—in short, an alarmist and a croaker. Such an impression is not calculated to render a pessimist a popular character, for the world loves not a prophet of evil. People, as a rule, rather like to be deceived ; they cherish their bright illusions, and do not care to have dreary realities thrust upon them. They are apt to consider a pessimist, therefore, like a candid friend—as a person to be avoided. Such prejudice may be excused among the ignorant and the thoughtless, who have never taken the trouble to ascertain what pessimism really means ; but it is quite unpardonable in writers who lay claim to some scientific knowledge of the subject. Yet it is among these self-sufficient doctrinaires and smatterers in science, who are constantly lecturing on the world and its ways and pronouncing authoritatively on the grave problems of the future, that one meets with the crudest ignorance of that spiritual element and tendency of modern thought which has led to the pessimistic view

of the universe. Thus, among writers who might be expected to know better, one frequently finds the term "pessimism" used almost as one of reproach, and applied indiscriminately to the railings of a dyspeptic historian like Carlyle, to the warning notes of austere critics who are justly dissatisfied with the existing order of things, or to the baseless apprehensions of respectable bigotry.

Considering, therefore, how much evident misconception exists on this subject, it may not be without interest to indicate briefly the leading principles of these much-discarded tenets, which are, nevertheless, held by some of the foremost thinkers of the age.

Pessimism is not so much a system of philosophy in itself as the reaction against a much older doctrine, which has been embodied in various schools of thought and been adopted in certain modern aspects of religious teaching.

The hypothesis of the Benevolent Order of the Universe may lay claim to considerable antiquity: it lent itself to many bright and consoling reflections on the end and aim of our existence, and it is, in many respects, a sublime idea. Unfortunately, it is found, after practical inquiry, to be in woeful contradiction with the actual conditions of our existence.

The ancients, indeed, were satisfied with a vague belief in "the eternal fitness of things"; but modern optimism has gone beyond this, and assumed, in a fundamental maxim, that all things in nature are ordered and directed by an All-wise Dispensation for the supreme good of humanity and the everlasting glory of God. Such exalted speculations, however beautiful in the abstract, do not come within the scope of any methodical inquiry; they may be a matter of faith, a theme for poetry, a text for sermons, but they are not to be considered as logical or

scientific deductions. The leading principles of this philosophy are to be found in a metrical work of high merit, full of brilliant epigrams and beautiful metaphors, and which, at the time of its publication, was generally accepted as sound and orthodox. Pope's celebrated *Essay on Man*, written with the noble purpose "to vindicate the ways of God to man," went to establish conclusively that "Whatever is, is right."

According to this edifying view, we live in the best of all possible worlds, and all things may be looked upon as ordained for our ultimate and especial benefit. "Man never is, but always to be, blessed." So sings the poet and so reasons the moralist. The most benevolent purpose underlies all the apparent incongruities and inconsistencies of life; the jarring discords in the elements of our nature are only the necessary concomitants to perfect harmony; the grievous ills and sufferings of humanity exist only for our advantage; war, pestilence, and famine answer a useful purpose; and even sin is a Divine institution, and contributes to the general good.

These ideas were not, in the first place, prompted by religion; they arose from an *a priori* theory of the universe, and the belief in a benevolent design in nature. They were professed by philosophers of the freethinking school, and were opposed to the prevailing theological tenets. But, after a time, they were countenanced by the Church, and they have since acquired a sort of religious sanction, to which they are hardly entitled. For the spirit of Christianity is one of renunciation of the world, and inculcates a belief that the ways of the flesh and the attractions of life are essentially evil.

But optimism was found to be a convenient doctrine for an Established Church, as, indeed, for established government, established property, and every other sort of

establishment. Those who were the fortunate possessors of power, privilege, and wealth were well pleased with a doctrine of perfect satisfaction in the existing order of things. Like the comforting belief in Predestination, it was eminently acceptable to the chosen body of the elect.

For the poor and the unfortunate there is much less ground for congratulation. Yet they were instructed to be contented with their humble lot, to cheerfully submit to authority, and to bear with pious resignation the miseries and discomforts of their wretched lives. Above all, they were exhorted to put their trust in Providence and to hope for the best. From this way of thinking there have arisen some very absurd notions and most unreasonable expectations among the bigoted and the vulgar. It is a common idea, for instance, among many people that all living creatures have been placed in this world for some useful purpose; and such people will foolishly ask one another what on earth can be the good of the mosquito. They also wonder why poor cripples should have been brought into the world only to suffer and to die. Wars and disasters they look upon as a scourge of God, sent to chastise men for their sins; fatal epidemics as special judgments for some national back-sliding; and an earthquake as a terrible warning to all unbelievers. The same class of people are fully convinced that marriages are made in heaven; that a special Providence sends food for the hungry mouths of babes; and that everything comes right in the end.

Optimism is inclined to paint the world *couleur de rose*; to make light of hardships and difficulties; and to encourage hopeful anticipations. There should be no quarrel with any such amiable enthusiasm.

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast”; and we ought, surely, not to begrudge such an innocent

consolation to poor human nature in its many sufferings. The greatest charm of life lies in its happy illusions, and these should not be roughly dispelled. It is only when hope and illusion are embodied in a philosophical system, and when the circumstances of our existence are deliberately misrepresented in consequence, that the party of truth and realism should join issue. It is well to be satisfied with one's lot, but it is not well to live in a fool's paradise.

Optimism flourished vigorously during the last century, but it may be said to have had its day. It met with some hard knocks from the first, and has often been turned into ridicule. Voltaire satirised it in his amusing tale of *Candide*, and many great poets and philosophical writers have assailed it since. But it remained for some of the pessimists of the modern German school to enter into formal conflict with the system, and to shatter it to its very foundation. At the present time there are very few leading thinkers who would care to echo the old adage, "Whatever is, is right"; while, as for the famous line already quoted, "Man never is, but always to be, blest," a modern reading, with a varied punctuation, alters the sense to mean: *Man never is blessed, but always expects to be so*, which has a much more realistic ring about it.

Pessimism goes to the opposite extreme, and asserts emphatically that the world is bad, that an element of evil pervades all the conditions of our existence and poisons its flow from the source. Pessimism further holds that the career of man in this transitory life is fraught with sorrow and disappointment; that he is constantly misled with false hopes, afflicted with grievous pains, beset with cruel tribulations, and oppressed with ceaseless care. Pessimism attempts to show that the condition of the great mass of humanity is one in which

suffering predominates. Whether this is really the worst of all possible worlds is open to question; but Schopenhauer, the apostle of pessimism, shows that in many places a very slight turn for the worse would bring about the extinction of existing communities. The struggle for existence is so intense that whole nations are bordering on destitution, and it would need a very slight departure from the usual course of nature—a prolonged drought, for instance—to depopulate extensive countries. During the potato famine in Ireland it is estimated that fully 300,000 persons died of starvation, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts made to save them and the help that was near at hand. The failure of the monsoon in India has struck down at one blow as great a number as constitutes the whole population of Australia. A single flood in China has been known to sweep a million of inhabitants to destruction. Where the vicissitudes of nature are not so badly felt, the hatred of man to man often accomplishes the same result. In the last South American war Paraguay as a nation was nearly wiped out, three-fourths of the whole adult male population having perished. In many countries a state of semi-starvation is almost chronic, and in most of them destitution seems to be well nigh the normal condition of the great mass of the people. Pain, sickness, and want are nearly everywhere found to be intimately related to human life; vice and sin form its most elementary constituents, with suffering as the universal outcome, in a thousand different forms and degrees. But it is not only in its material aspects that human nature is thus sadly afflicted. Many people talk as if man were essentially a machine that only needs to be well nourished for motive power and well oiled to run smoothly. Such is by no means the case. The pangs of actual want are slight in comparison with the enormous

amount of discomfort and unhappiness arising from spiritual and moral causes. Man may be regarded as essentially an animal; but it is certainly not as an animal that he suffers most. Hunger and cold are hard to bear; but for the largest proportion of mankind the sorrows, the disappointments, the anxieties and worries of an artificial existence, are much harder still. In this respect civilisation has brought about a multitude of bodily and mental ailments unknown to the savage state. Were it not so, we might confidently look among the favoured classes, who are well supplied with the good things of this world, for the highest examples of virtue and content. But we should look there in vain. Life is so beset with evil, and so full of strange contrarieties, that the man of pleasure is often one of the most miserable of beings. Bad as society generally is, it is not unfrequently among those who have the least excuse for wrongdoing that the worst wrongdoing is to be found. For there is a moral canker in the very heart of human nature, and its far-reaching effects leave no part of the social body untouched.

Optimism relies for its lofty aspirations after the universal good on the moral order of the universe. Pessimism fails to discern any justice or morality in nature whatever. On the contrary, it is held that, so far as we can judge of Nature by her acts, she is quite devoid of any sense of right or wrong, or of any moral intention. Apart from the maternal instinct and the parental care for offspring, which are necessary for the preservation of the species, and also a sort of good fellowship among certain animals, due to their gregarious habits, there are in nature an absolute want of heart and a total disregard of equity. The whole animal kingdom is an armed camp, intent on internal warfare and ruthless destruction. Every vice is apparent and

rampant in the animal community—greed, cruelty, treachery, violence, duplicity, and fraud; every species of deception is practised to impose on the innocent or to entrap the unwary. Brutal force and low cunning everywhere rule supreme, and without a single redeeming virtue. Nature, indeed, shows a tendency to development in the organisms of its creatures, a rise from a lower to a higher type; but there is no evidence of any moral improvement in this. There is nothing to show that the tiger of the present day is a whit more amiable than was his prototype of the tertiary age. Nature, moreover, is quite devoid of truth. She is fickle and deceitful, and crooked in all her ways. This is specially discernible in man—her crowning work—who has ever been made a victim to cruel delusions. According to the pessimistic view, if we now turn to the history of mankind for some better evidences of a moral design in the universe we are doomed to bitter disappointment. We find in the story of nations a sad exhibition of oppression by the strong and of suffering by the weak. The best and wisest of men have generally been persecuted, virtue has been discarded, and vice has triumphed. The world, no doubt, has improved in many respects, and there has been wonderful progress in civilisation; but human nature has remained very much the same, from the earliest records of the Egyptian tombs to these enlightened times, and it is with human nature that we are principally concerned in this inquiry.

If men would be rendered virtuous and happy on scientific principles, there might perhaps be some hope for humanity; but there is no evidence whatever in support of such a desirable theory. Anything in the way of a scientific Utopia, moreover, is much to be deprecated; in the first place, it is quite unattainable, and, secondly, it would be utterly insufferable. No

ordinary mortal would care to live up to that assumed standard of mechanical perfection.

Nevertheless, it is somewhat upon a scientific solution of the difficulty that modern optimism mainly relies. It is to be a question of machinery after all. The optimist of the present day points triumphantly to the wonderful advance which has been made in all the arts and industries, to the extraordinary increase in production, to the development of trade, the progress of knowledge, and the spread of education. He expatiates complacently on our railways, our docks, our merchant fleets, our immense accumulations of wealth, our marvellous inventions, and our ceaseless activity. He places a money value on all our stupendous achievements and increased possessions, and he proves to his entire satisfaction that the world is surpassingly rich. Moreover, he contends, not without some show of reason, that society is constantly progressing; that there has been a general advance all along the line; that the working classes are better fed, better clothed, better lodged, and better governed than in olden time; that the conditions of existence are, in many respects, less irksome to bear, and that many of the worst evils that oppressed society in the Dark Ages have been greatly palliated, if not entirely removed. Judging from so much solid gain and positive improvement in the present, the optimist of to-day is apt to be sanguine for the morrow.

But, unfortunately, through all this pæan of triumph and glorification there sounds a very sad note—sad and deep—which gathers strength through all the noisy clamour and rampant turmoil of life, and, at times, dominates the whole. It is the cry of the multitudes of the destitute, of the countless numbers who strive and struggle incessantly for the barest necessities of

life; it is the wail of the unfortunate, of the weary, and of the afflicted; it is the heartrending appeal from the dark and dismal abodes of misery, from sweating dens, and from the hideous resorts of vice and degradation. We cannot turn a deaf ear to this far-reaching cry, which is not only piteous, but often threatening and terrible.

As a scathing commentary on the glowing account of the wealth and splendour of the period in which we live, we have before us the appalling statistics of prevailing destitution, showing that a considerable proportion of the whole population of the United Kingdom are doomed to end their miserable lives in public hospitals or in the poor-house.

Looking calmly and dispassionately at the state of Europe, and even of America, at the present day, there is certainly no great cause for congratulation. Financially, several of the principal nations are on the verge of insolvency; their resources are strained to the utmost by the crushing weight of enormous armaments; their internal conditions are in a deplorable state; and their social institutions rotten to the core. The fierce contention going on between labour and capital, the harrowing unrest and deep resentment among the workers, are only too apparent under an enforced and ominous calm. In the opinion of many keen observers, we are treading on a volcano, which may at any moment burst forth in flames of discord, with a terrible upheaval of the masses, and overwhelm the civilised world in a convulsion such as humanity has never before witnessed.

But, apart from this gloomy outlook of disastrous war and social revolution, there are other sources of evil, affecting society at large, which may well cause the most anxious concern to the moralist. Never before in the history of mankind has the power of gold been so

mighty or so universal. Mammon aspires to become the absolute ruler and dispenser of all things. Most human institutions are already partially under its malevolent sway, and its dominion appears to be constantly extending. Money was always a great and an evil power in the world, but it was never before as dominant or as pernicious as at present. Formerly there were other objects of veneration, there were rival influences to guide and control humanity. But under the extraordinary developments of modern civilisation, and especially the application of machinery to almost every branch of production, the purchasing power of gold in all human affairs has tended steadily to increase. Money is now the graven image before which mankind meanly grovels. Money has become the measure of all things. The love of gold is stifling most of the nobler aspirations in the heart of man, and is every day increasing its claim to be considered the universal passion.

Thus pessimism has a heavy indictment to bring against the world, notwithstanding our boasted progress and much-lauded civilisation. But pessimism must be admitted to take an extreme view. There is much good, as well as much evil, in the world, and the aim of true philosophy should be to estimate these relative positions fairly, and not to magnify the one at the expense of the other. Yet it may perhaps be justly claimed for pessimism that it is more spiritual and sympathetic than the opposite belief. And surely, if any practical good is to be done towards ameliorating the present unsatisfactory condition of things, towards assisting the needy, consoling the afflicted, and alleviating suffering, such benevolent work is more likely to be accomplished by those who realise keenly the many evils of existence, and who are sensible of its grievous pains, than by those

of the opposite faction, who express themselves as perfectly satisfied with the world as it is, who only look at the bright side of life, and who are fully convinced that all things here below are ordered for the best.

It remains to consider the ethical and religious aspect of the question, and this is all the more necessary as of late years there has been a prevailing attempt to inculcate a bastard sort of Christian doctrine, a religion of pleasant humanity, a system of popular piety made easy, to suit the materialistic tendencies of the age.

Christianity, we are now taught, has to adapt itself to the ideas and requirements of our present civilisation. This is essential to its very existence as a religion. Poverty, which is not in repute, is no longer held to be sacred to the Divine Cause, but, on the contrary, wealth—the more the better—has found a broad and well-paved road to the kingdom of heaven; for philanthropy covers a multitude of sins, both of commission and omission, and the rich man can best afford to endow colleges, to be charitable to the poor, and liberal to the Church; especially towards the end of his successful career. It is a convenient and optimistic sort of religion that invites its disciples to enjoy the good things of this world, to truckle to fortune, to amass gain wherever possible, to seek for honours and popularity, and to judge of right and wrong by statistics. This is called the religion of "healthy-mindedness"; it is the "liberal" religion that pays best. Warfare is no longer regarded as un-Christian; indeed, it is almost looked upon as a divine institution. Thus we find Reverends and Right-Reverends quite ready, when called upon, to bless in the name of Christ guns and volunteers intended for the bloody destruction of multitudes of helpless people, only struggling for their independence, but interfering

unfortunately with matters of State policy—the expansion of an empire, the rectification of a frontier, or the demands of an exclusive trade. We also find itinerant preachers of the Gospel who go about patting respectability on the back, discovering excellent excuses for every luxurious indulgence, and who teach that the best way to serve God is to begin by serving yourself. These godly persons are, as a rule, well satisfied with the existing condition of things; they see material progress everywhere, and they estimate these achievements at their money value. Or else they cheerfully quote the theory of evolution and the “survival of the fittest,” and in a scientific jargon pronounce “Creation to be Good.”

It is, indeed, the peculiarity of these principles of morality to ignore individual wrongs and suffering in the light of alleged public benefit. Right is here always with the majority. Success knows no wrong. It is surprising to note with what complacency the optimist of this school looks upon the worst disasters that afflict humanity. He readily finds reasons for consolation, if not congratulation, for every calamity in which he is not personally affected.

Wars and revolutions, he maintains, answer a good purpose by stimulating national energies and developing moral resources, and he proves conclusively by statistical returns that his country has benefited enormously, under the blessing of Providence, by its conquests and annexations. The cholera has decimated a city and inflicted untold misery on thousands, but the optimist is well satisfied to look upon the event as a useful lesson in sanitary engineering, and he calls to mind that it took three visitations of that deadly epidemic to bring about the deep drainage of London. The hardy pioneers in a new colony undergo endless hardships and misfortunes, and frequently perish in the attempt. Well, they

have paved the way for others to follow in their footsteps, and eventually prosperity will be obtained, for the general good. Most satisfactory! A terrible famine has raged in the Far East, and the reports of starving multitudes are appalling to hear. Sad, no doubt; but the country was much too thickly populated. It needed thinning out. All for the best! Haunts of vice and prostitution are horrible to contemplate, but remember that they are necessary evils. Then it is best not to contemplate them. Turn your modest eyes another way. It is wise to ignore many unpleasant things, and it is even a recognised principle of British legislation not to see much that is going on.

People who enjoy robust health, sufficient means, and pleasant prospects are enjoined to be satisfied with their earthly lot and to be thankful to Providence. They should cultivate also the Idea of the Good. But by "good" is generally understood something in the sense of good to eat, good houses, good clothes, good entertainment.

Under these happy circumstances religion would not appear to be a necessary ingredient for the general well-being; but it is still largely and extensively taught on optimistic lines, and, no doubt, it also answers a good purpose, for the parsons.

Religion, however, like metaphysics, cannot be lightly disposed of. Its roots extend too deeply into human nature to be easily eradicated. The craving which most thinking beings have to inquire into their spiritual condition, and to ponder over the enigma of life, is irresistible. Science affords them no solace to the soul, and the so-called Religion of Humanity is much too vague and visionary to inspire permanent enthusiasm. To religion, therefore, mankind has turned from time immemorial for consolation and support in the hope of a

future life. Now, all the great religions of the world of a spiritual character have been profoundly pessimistic. It is necessary that it should be so, as the essential of religious worship is the renunciation of worldly desires and sensual pleasures, and the seeking for salvation in a higher life. The Christian heaven is only to be reached through a new spiritual birth and a life of personal sacrifice and self-denial. The main tenet of Buddhism is the worthlessness of existence; while Mohammed, in the Koran, declared: "The world is a curse, and all that is in it is a curse, except the remembrance of God, and all which aids it." But the precept and the example of Holy Living are in absolute contradiction to the rule of violence, the greed of competition, the worship of Mammon, and the "hustling," so distinctive of this advanced age.

The attempt to preach, under the cloak of a conventional religion, the approval of the existing order of the world aroused the ire of Schopenhauer in these scathing terms:—

For the rest, I cannot here avoid the statement that, to me, Optimism, when it is not merely the thoughtless talk of such as harbour nothing but words under their low foreheads, appears not merely as an absurd, but also as a *wicked*, way of thinking; as a bitter mockery of the unspeakable suffering of humanity. Let no man think that Christianity is favourable to optimism, for, on the contrary, in the Gospels, *world* and *evil* are used as almost synonymous.

Pessimism, if not always religious, is at least inclined to the religious sentiment; it takes a more philosophical view of existing conditions, and looks Reality straight in the face.

The main difference between the two systems is that the one sees life as it is, and the other as it should be. Another radical distinction arises from a different point of view, which regards the individual rather than the community. Pessimism deals mostly with our personal existence, because every man is a world unto himself—

has to work out his own salvation and to suffer in his own person. Even should he strive for others, yet must he live for himself; and there is no justification for wrong inflicted on the individual in order that others may profit thereby. In the boasted advance of the Juggernaut of civilisation multitudes are crushed or mutilated, and the piteous cries of the sufferers are entitled to be heard above the din of a jubilant and callous crowd. Pessimism realises the brotherhood of man in our common sufferings and our common end.

It must surely be admitted that optimism is mainly a matter of faith; and therein lies its strength, for faith is, happily, beyond the reach of empiricism and of logic. There is no reasoning against a settled conviction. Those who can earnestly believe that all is regulated here below for the best, and that even their bitterest trials and afflictions are only "blessings in disguise," are to be envied. It would be wrong and cruel to try to disillusionise them, for

"Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise."

The pessimist—perhaps unfortunately for himself—cannot share in that consolation. But, although the contemplation of the pains and penalties of life, and the vanity of it all, are distressing to a sympathetic mind, yet it need not become dismal or morose. Resignation to the inevitable, and reliance on those moral and intellectual attainments that are not subject to chance, afford strength and calm to the soul. A pessimist, although tinged with gentle melancholy, may be a happy man—in the best sense of happiness. Yet it must be admitted that health and temperament have much to do in regulating such a state of mind. In an exaggerated form the tendency to pessimism may become morbid and misanthropical. The late W. James, in one of his popular

essays, terms it "a religious disease," "a nightmare view of life"; but in another place the same author remarks: "If, however, all he means is that the badness of some parts does not prevent his acceptance of a universe whose other parts give him satisfaction, I welcome him as an ally."

And therein lies the kernel of the whole matter. Neither doctrine, pushed to extremes, can be maintained with right or common sense. There is an infinite variety in the aspect of our existence; light and shade abound everywhere, side by side, and the contention that the sum of human joy exceeds that of human misery, or vice versa, is but a silly controversy that can lead to no practical result. Such mental conditions are beyond our knowledge, and cannot be weighed in any balance. For who can measure the height of ecstatic delight, or find a plummet to sound the depths of despair? Moreover, the states of human existence are so various that the condition which satisfies one class of people might be utterly unbearable elsewhere. Although the enlightened few may find an exquisite pleasure in intellectual resources, yet the common herd are happy without knowing it, and the many are happiest without thinking at all. A good supply of animal spirits more than makes up with the mass for deficiency of intellect. The "man of pleasure" is much to be pitied, and what is called "the gay world" is but a sorry business; yet it is not necessary for the pessimist to withdraw entirely from society, or to condemn all popular shows and amusements. He has to live in the world, and must take some part in the excitement of the hour. It has often been asserted that no thinking man would care to live his life over again; but the contention loses much of its force from the fact that no man has ever been given the option of choosing, while it is certain that most men cling tenaciously to life, bad as it is.

In this maze of conflicting lights, this whirl of discordant emotions, the pessimist philosopher treads his cautious way, never much elated or unduly depressed, moderating his passions, controlling ambition, avoiding all excesses, seeking always to discriminate the good from the bad, the grain from the chaff, the true from the false, and to regulate his conduct accordingly. He expects but little from human nature, and is therefore rarely disappointed. As he realises that love is the mainspring of happiness in this life, he cultivates the warm affections of the heart, notwithstanding the sore rebuffs and bereavements that so frequently attend upon them.

"Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

Suffering he *must* endure, for suffering is intimately woven into the texture of our existence, but he bears such inevitable trials with fortitude and resignation. He knows that grief is mainly due to our mental attitude; and as this is greatly under his own control, he tries to mitigate the pang, or to rise superior to it. Moreover, he finds compensations in most of his afflictions, for such is a dispensation of nature. There is also a wide field open for innocent and elevating enjoyment in the study of nature, science, and literature, or the practice of music and art, and he gleans there all he can, according to his tastes and accomplishments. Thus he avoids idleness and escapes ennui.

No rapture fires his soul, no bright star above guides his course; he indulges in no sanguine illusions about the reformation of the world, neither does he worry himself concerning posterity. He does not aspire to be a hero, neither does he incline to become a martyr; but he pursues his even way, keeping rather in the shade, endeavouring to do what is right, and content to fulfil all manifold duties.

His religion, whatever that may be, satisfies the aspirations of his soul, and he generally keeps it to himself. Death has no terrors for him ; he will live and die with equanimity.



## CARLYLE AND HERO-WORSHIP

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SOME seventy years ago England was in a state of ferment—the like of which it has not experienced since—over its economical, industrial, and political condition. Important changes were to herald a modern era of extraordinary activity, and wonderful material developments were setting in. New prophets had arisen, promulgating a new economical gospel, which, crude and commonplace as it may appear to us now, was then revolutionising public opinion. Rationalism was rampant, and science was steadily undermining the foundations of the venerable edifice of national belief. The wildest enthusiasm over new doctrines prevailed, side by side with harrowing fears for the stability of society. The heroes of the Reform Bill (as they called themselves) were in all their glory, and predicting great things from the emancipation of the masses; the schoolmaster was “abroad,” or on his way about to inaugurate an age of enlightenment; and the corn laws, over which factions had been convulsed, were doomed.

John Stuart Mill and his party, working with the pen, with Cobden and Bright haranguing on the public platform, were disseminating the principles of Utilitarianism and Free Trade, which were soon to be accepted by the commercial section of the nation as gospel truths, and which have been clung to tenaciously ever since.

Political economy became the absorbing topic of the

day. A new standard of the rights and duties of mankind was laid down. The relations between man and man were to be placed on a strictly commercial footing; the business of life was declared to be mainly a bartering one, and "to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest" its fundamental maxim. Everything was to be reduced to its money value, including even *honesty*, which had its price; and the great moving forces of society were held to be nothing more than the law of supply and demand, which admitted of being regulated with almost mechanical precision.

At the same time, a great revolution was being effected in critical and historical literature. New ideas were advanced on religious and social questions that scandalised the established notions, and were denounced from the orthodox quarters as subversive of all order and morality. It was openly preached that man was merely the outgrowth of his physical surroundings; that his character depended mainly on food and climate; that his moral responsibility was a fiction; that the doctrine of freewill was incompatible with natural law, and could be reduced to the *resultant* of conflicting forces; that crime was only a form of disease, conscience a bogey of our own imagining; "right" and "wrong" interchangeable terms, according to the conditions in which they existed and the prevailing ethical ideas; also that so-called great men were the production of the times in which they lived, and that they always arose under the required influences and opportunities; that no veneration was to be attached to a name, or devout following to an example, however eminent; and that the study of man was only a part of the science of natural history.

While learned doctrinaires were thus pleasantly engaged in rearranging the basis of society or settling the relationship between labour and capital to their

entire satisfaction; while philosophers and historians were disposing of the moral nature of man under a new and comprehensive system of the universe; while a refined section of kindly optimists and transcendentalists was lost in the contemplation of the beautiful uniformity of the natural law, the perfect "fitness of things" in this "best of worlds," and the glorious prospect of ulterior improvement in the blessed cause of humanity; while all this brilliant intellectual display was being happily exhibited to the world, a not inconsiderable portion of the nation was verging on starvation, and was making itself heard in a very different manner.

A ferment of another kind, produced by misery and despair, was sounding the alarm, and threatening the stability of society by force and fury. In England the popular agitation boiled over in various insurrections in the manufacturing districts, and in the abortive outburst of Chartism; on the Continent of Europe the widespread suffering and discontent convulsed and terrorised society, upset existing Governments, drove monarchs from their thrones, and culminated in the revolution of '48, which established the Second Republic in France—an effort spasmodically great, but, alas! too misguided in its purpose and too inherently weak to secure any permanent benefit to the popular cause or lasting gain to liberty.

It was in these stirring times, and participating himself hotly in the elements of strife, that Carlyle wrote three of his characteristic works—*Chartism*, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, and, finally, *Past and Present*. The last work was composed in the short space of seven weeks, and evidently under conditions of intense excitement.

Carlyle joined in the fray with conflicting feelings of sympathy and rage—sympathy, deep and strong, for the real grievances and sufferings of the workers; a mournful pity for their blindness and ignorance, and sorrowful

despair at their helplessness ; rage, fierce and ungovernable, at the callous and mercenary spirit of the times, its materialistic tendencies, and its gospel of self-interest. Carlyle denounced it as a soulless and degenerate age. All through his writings of this period the same ideas and illustrations will be found constantly recurring, and something like a political system propounded, which involves some strange inconsistencies. But the author is nevertheless consistent enough in the general attitude of thought assumed. He is principally taken with mournful condemnation of the new order of things, and bitter lamentations over the loss of that spiritual belief, that earnestness of purpose, and reverence of mind which animated the olden time and inspired hero-worship. It would be quite impossible to follow him through this long and rather wearisome arraignment of modern society ; his endless invective against all shams, lies, puffing, quackery, valets, knaves, and fools, and devil-worship ; or his mournful predictions of the imminent collapse of a sordid and godless race.

Much should be allowed to the ardent disposition of the man ; still more, perhaps, to the excitement of the times. We of the present day can look back with calmness and discrimination on this period, which raised so many hopes and fears in our fathers, and produced so wild an agitation in social and political circles. It was a period of transition. It began important changes which are still going on, and it finally disposed of spent forces which will never be revived. For national life, like that of the individual, cannot go back. Conditions of social and religious existence, once departed, can never be restored, any more than nature can resurrect an extinct species.

It is certain that the modern Englishman has altered very materially from the old-fashioned type. John Bull

is no longer the side-whiskered, ruddy-cheeked, beef-fed, portly, emphatic, narrow-minded, and consequential personage he used to be represented. He looks, dresses, and behaves now-a-days very much like other people. He has lost much of his reverence for his established religion, he seldom expatiates on his Glorious Constitution, and he is less conscious of his own wonderful superiority over the rest of the world. He no longer venerates a lord, whether temporal or spiritual, as he used to do. He has discarded many former insular prejudices, and he may also have fallen off in grace and in some of his most sterling qualities.

At any rate, the change has taken place, and, whether to be welcomed or deplored, it is unalterable. Carlyle's bitter repinings over the past state of the national conscience and character are unavailing, and what seemed to add to his bitterness was his full knowledge that such lamentations were fruitless. A new generation has its own destiny to fulfil and to adapt itself to its altered surroundings, and it can no longer be modelled on a state of things that is past and gone; nor would it be very desirable to attempt such a restoration if we had to go back to the twelfth century for a model. For if Carlyle finds much to admire and dilate upon in barbarous times, it must be admitted that he carefully hides from view all the worse side of the picture, all that is gross and repulsive in the primitive existence of those dark ages—the slavish degradation of the serf, the cruelty and rapacity of the nobles, the crass bigotry of the Church, the depths of ignorance and superstition among the people, the prevalence of cruel and hideous wars, and the rule of violence and oppression. If a parallel is drawn, it should be done in a fair and impartial spirit. But nothing of the sort is attempted in any of these books. The purpose of the writer was evidently to extol the good

characteristics of a former age at the expense of the bad ones of modern times, but without any regard to a real comparison.

Carlyle is a sort of Don Quixote, moving in a land of enchantment, listening to sphere melodies, worshipping eternal abstractions, invoking phantoms, and fighting demons, with an occasional tilt against a windmill, on an eminence. His arch-enemies are the two monsters Mammon-worship and Dilettantism. These he belaboured soundly on every available occasion, and not without telling effect.

I cannot attempt to follow him in his furious raid against the selfishness, the humbug, and the impiety of the present age. Much in these extraordinary writings forms an eloquent protest against wrong and falsehood; many of the opinions enunciated are full of force and wisdom, and have not been without beneficial effect on modern thought. At the same time, it is to be regretted that there is mixed with the solid grain a large amount of chaff; while the extravagance of his propositions and the virulence of the diction greatly mar the nobler inspiration of the work, and must tend to detract from its practical utility.

Still less could I attempt, in the short space at my disposal, to discuss the numerous important questions mooted. The author himself never condescends to discuss anything. He preaches, exhorts, or rebukes, but never argues. He stands erect like a prophet of old, calling the people to repentance, or threatening with the vengeance of heaven a stiff-necked and idolatrous generation. He hurls forth his anathemas, but he rarely stoops to persuasion, and utterly disdains any reasoning process. Next to political economy, what he seems to detest most is logic.

He simply lays down the law. He does not doubt, nor

does he permit of doubt in others ; he is cocksure of everything. He does not quote authorities, for he is an authority unto himself. His principles, he says, are permanent and immutable ; they are written in the light of heaven, ordained by divine justice from the beginning of the world. But he has no notion of reducing these exalted principles to ordinary practice ; he has no concern with ways and means, or any care for legislation.

These are matters of detail, work for the still strong man, who should be given absolute power to deal with men and things according to their requirements. The still strong man is the only resource ; he alone can put things straight. Carlyle has no faith in doctrinaires, babblers, and parliaments. He has no regard for collective wisdom. What he admires and reverences is the hero, and the only salvation he can see for these degenerate days of universal suffrage and popular rights is hero-worship. "There's such divinity doth hedge a hero" that all governing power should be centred in him, and it is enough for the people to labour and to obey.

First catch your hero ; there's the difficulty. Carlyle has no doubt that the hero is present—if only he could be found. He exclaims, in *Past and Present* :—

O ye kind Heavens, there is in every nation and community a fittest, a wisest, bravest, best ; whom could we find and make king over us, all were in every truth well ; the best the God and Nature had permitted us to make it. By what art discover him ? Will the Heavens in their pity teach us no art, for our need of him is great.

Carlyle is no believer in equality, for some are more gifted than others, and he favours an aristocracy of talent. The wise, the just, and the strong are intended to rule ; for such, he says, is ordained by the Eternal Silences. Here, again, there is a practical difficulty : how is this aristocracy of talent to be selected ?

For the people—the common lot—there is but one right and one duty, and that is *work*. This is the gospel according to Carlyle. There is nothing else. Work is holy, work is worship, work is heaven. Every man can claim the right to work; he can even demand, according to eternal laws, a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, although *who* is to pay him and *what* is the amount of remuneration seem to be left an open question. But outside of work man has nothing to look for. If he is free to work, he has all the liberty he is entitled to; for thus saith our author:—

Liberty? The true liberty of a man, you would say, consisted in his finding out, or being forced to find out, the right path, and to walk thereon. To learn, to be taught, what work he actually was able for, and then by permission, persuasion, or even compulsion, to set about doing the same! That is true blessedness, honour, liberty, and maximum well-being; if liberty be not that, I, for one, have no care for liberty.

This is one way of looking at the matter; and, according to such a view, the negro slave, toiling under the lash, is a free man—for has he not full liberty to work? Not only that, but work is actually found for him, and it is work he is specially fitted for. This, surely, is the greatest blessedness. And, although the overseer's whip may occasionally descend on his bare shoulders rather unexpectedly, it is only an incentive to work, or a touch of that “compulsion” which Carlyle so judiciously recommends when necessity calls for it.

This doctrine of liberty, as the author truly remarks, is one of many, but is one which, I should think, would readily recommend itself to the Czar of all the Russias, the Shah of Persia, and all other large employers of labour; for the ordinary run of humanity it has less to recommend it.

Then, as to happiness—“Our being's end and aim,”

as the poet sings—Carlyle will have none of it. Happiness, indeed! He storms and raves at the very mention of it. What right has any man to aspire to be happy? It is like his impudence! The Eternal Silences never decreed that men should be happy. Already, in *Sartor Resartus*, he had sounded the same note, and scoffed at the idea that any person should dare to be unhappy because he “is not sufficiently honoured, nourished, soft-bedded, and lovingly cared for”; but in a later work he waxes much more virulently on the subject. It is only possible for me to allude to a few salient points in this stern and unflinching philosophy of duty and work—good enough in its way, no doubt, but hardly acceptable when carried out to its extreme limits.

Concerning sentiment, as a factor in life, Carlyle has usually but little to say. Sentiment, I would submit, is the heart of the world; from it emanate all the kindly passions and benevolences of human nature. Love is the great bond of humanity, the mainspring of noble and unselfish action; it is also the soul of religion; but love, “human or divine,” was evidently not much in Carlyle’s thought when he wrote his book on hero-worship. His religion was that of his austere Puritan forefathers, and partook much more of fear and authority than of love. Reverence, indeed, he inculcated above all things—reverence for might and majesty, wherever found: reverence for the sublime and the beautiful; reverence for superior learning; reverence for talent, which he considered the special gift of Providence. Wisdom, according to Carlyle, is the highest good. Thus knowledge becomes not only power, but also salvation. On the other hand, evil is chaos and darkness—not moral obscurity, but simply ignorance; and the Devil is only the Prince of Blockheads. Stupidity and wickedness go together, and the most

unpardonable sin is idleness. Thus, it will be seen, the moral element is almost entirely wanting in such a system; and sin, the evil principle of life, is left out of account.

Of woman, her softening influence and elevating mission in life, there is absolutely no mention. The author is evidently too intent on slaying the lions in his path to trouble about the gentler half of humanity. Nor are the refinements of life or the fine arts any more to his taste; they savour too much of luxury, idleness, and the Devil.

Work, work alone, is to be tolerated; and such work is to be, not what the labourer would like best, but what he is best fitted for according to the ruling of his more gifted taskmaster. And, above all, "throne the hero."

Carlyle's opinions may often be considered extravagant—they are certainly extravagantly expressed—but there is in many of them a kernel of truth that has been of influence in modern thought. His teaching is essentially one of righteousness, self-sacrifice, and regard for duty. He loved truth above all things. Though grievous and crabbed in disposition and too much given to railing at the world, yet his heart was good, and his mind was inspired with a noble enthusiasm for humanity. Above all, his integrity of character was absolute; he sacrificed nothing to the demands of conventionality, the love of popularity, or the need of gain. He spoke his message fearlessly, regardless of consequences, and equally indifferent to censure or to praise.

All these characteristics of the man are clearly exhibited in his work, which reflects both his good and bad qualities. Nor must it be supposed, because his views on social and political questions may be regarded as those of an inspired visionary, that they have had no useful effect in real life. Himself the most impracticable

of men and indifferent to the practical application of his tenets, yet the principles he advocated have in many ways influenced modern legislation and contributed to a change in public opinion. The good seed thus sown broadcast has already borne fruit. The principle of *laissez faire* in politics, which he so vigorously denounced, has been—whether for good or for evil—considerably departed from in later times.

The whole edifice of “orthodox” political economy, against which he battered so fiercely, has since been severely shaken and demolished in parts. The respect he claimed for labour and the ideas he cherished for its participation in the profits of capital have since been widely developed and partly realised. But the wish that lay nearest his heart was ever to impress his fellow-men with the conviction of their spiritual stature, of their universal brotherhood, and of their duty to work towards a nobler ideal than mere cash payments and the pitiful consideration of profit and loss. To such worthy sentiments all honour is due, and they will confer on his work a lasting renown, which none of its imperfections can entirely obliterate.



## EMERSON ON SELF-RELIANCE

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SELF-RELIANCE, according to the Transcendentalist School, to which Emerson belonged, is something much deeper, more intense, and far more comprehensive than a mere trust in one's own powers, or a just confidence in one's own judgment. That modest degree of personal independence might satisfy ordinary mortals, and even meet the demands of that self-esteem which most people are pretty well endowed with; but it does not nearly reach to the Emersonian ideal.

The glorious *ego*, which he would magnify into a self-sufficient entity, drawing its perceptions from a Divine inspiration and relying upon a sort of spiritual intuition for its rule of life, must stand alone and almost uncontrolled by its grosser surroundings. According to our transcendental author, man should cultivate and indulge, above all things, his own exalted self; he should study his own nature, not with a view to controlling or reforming it, but to make it his idol; he should be a law unto himself; he should consider his instincts as promptings from the Divine spirit within him, and he should accept such "involuntary perceptions" with a perfect faith. The ways of the world, the usages of society, the regulations of custom, as well as accepted beliefs in all matters, are to be lightly held, and not to be allowed to restrict his liberty or to influence his independent soul. He is to be a non-conformist, not only in religion, but in all things.

Standing at his giddy height, and supported by such boundless self-confidence, it is hardly to be wondered at should he look down with undisguised contempt on the common herd, which meekly follows its leaders.

“Power,” says Emerson, “is inborn.” “Power is in nature the essential measure of right.” “The relations of the soul to the Divine spirit are so pure that it is profane to seek to interpose helps.”

These may be very fine sentiments, but they are hardly applicable to the average of humanity or the ordinary requirements of our daily lives.

Our author may scorn help in theory; but what would he have done without it in his own case? What would this eminent man have been without the most unremitting help from his nurse when he was a baby in arms, or without help to learn his native tongue, or to lay the foundation of all his knowledge and acquirements? Without help of a very substantial character where would have been Emerson’s luxurious home to live in, his fine clothes to wear, his choice food to eat, his ample library to draw most of his ideas and illustrations from, and many other requisites which need not be specified, but which, no doubt, contributed materially to the comfort, the independence, and the happiness of his life?

What Emerson preached so complacently, but did not in any way carry into practice, another man of the same way of thinking, but of a far more earnest and heroic disposition—Henry Thoreau, the American ascetic—made the rule of his life, and honestly acted up to. This remarkable man—a mystic and a transcendentalist of an exalted type—determined to attain to that perfect independence and self-reliance which he considered essential to the highest development of his spiritual nature.

Thoreau determined to live to himself, by himself, and for himself. Accordingly he fled from the sordid and debased companionship of his fellow-men, and found refuge in that absolute solitude which Emerson so much liked to talk about. "I went to the woods," wrote Thoreau, "because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life—living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out the marrow of life; to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms."

So he went to the woods, and built himself a hut with his own hands, and lived mostly on fruit and grain of his own growing. He spent most of his days happily reposing in the bosom of his beloved nature, and most of his nights star gazing. "How can a man feel lonely," he exclaims somewhere, "when in the company of the Milky Way?" To such an ethereal nature and exalted mind that might be so; but I must confess, for my part, that I should prefer my friends not quite so far off.

Poor Thoreau made an experiment of himself in the noble cause of independence and self-reliance, but he soon died from the consequences, without ever solving the great problem, or even getting any nearer to the goal. Emerson preached eloquently on the subject while enjoying all the comforts and privileges of refined society, and he lived to a ripe old age.

Let his disciples be advised to follow his example, and not to seek for a greater amount of independence in life than their circumstances warrant. Extremes are bad in practice, and certainly to live up to the maxims of this

essay would carry a man to alarming extremities. But it is one of the peculiarities of these transcendentalist schools to run their pet theories to death, and to extend a truth beyond the bounds of truth. For truth is relative, and even virtue is only good in moderation. But there is no sort of moderation in the aphorisms of this essay, which, taken literally, would inculcate a gospel of egotism. Moreover, it is full of the most glaring contradictions. Thus, in one place he writes, when alluding to the claims of want and suffering on benevolence: "Are they *my* poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent I give to such men as do not belong to me, and to whom I do not belong."

A few pages further on he cries out: "All men have my blood, and I have all men's." As a rule, he expresses great contempt for action. A man is what he is, and not what he may appear or what he does. "I ask primary evidence that you are a man, and refuse this appeal from a man to his actions. I know that for myself it makes no difference whether I do or forbear those actions which are reckoned excellent." Immediately afterwards he makes out that action is the sole criterion in judging a man. "But do your work, and I shall know you."

Emerson's special *bête noir* is consistency. He looks upon consistency as unwarranted restriction on his personal freedom, and he scorns to submit to any such control. It is only little minds, he asserts, that stoop to such paltry considerations.

"With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, although it contradict everything you said

to-day." This is a hard saying, especially for the disciples who would fain know what the Apostle of Self-reliance would have them learn and inwardly digest. But he takes small account of such. The great thing for a man is to please himself; whether or no he pleases others is quite a secondary consideration.

"I shun father and mother and wife and brother," he tells us, "when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post *Whim*. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation. Expect me not to show cause why I seek or why I exclude company." Very pleasant for him, doubtless; but if father and mother and wife and brother were to adopt the same principle of action, it might at times be a very unpleasant household to live in! Even such a whimsical genius might then discover that a taste of common politeness in ordinary life, a few mutual concessions to other people's whims, and even a touch of self-denial and self-abnegation, might prove decidedly beneficial for the concord of the family.

It is quite amusing to notice the contemptuous neglect with which Emerson and the shining lights of his school affect to treat all the accumulated wisdom of past ages. They set no value on experience. They have absolutely no veneration for age. What is past is of no account; and as for the future, that does not trouble them much. The present, or rather *their* present, is all that concerns them.

History is especially obnoxious to them. If, in their sublime self-sufficiency, they hold themselves aloof from the doings and sayings of their contemporaries, then how much more must they despise the deeds and thoughts of their ignorant ancestors!

"History," writes Emerson, "is an impertinence and

an injury, if it be anything more than a cheerful apologue or parable of my being and becoming."

Enough has been quoted from this clever essay to show conclusively that it cannot be accepted literally, and that to take Emerson *au pied de la lettre* would be to make him responsible for sentiments and rules of conduct which were probably very far from his mind.

The style of the writer may have something to do with this. It is eminently epigrammatic, and consists mainly of short and polished sentences, pointed remarks, and quaint conceits, which are often brilliant and suggestive, but rarely sound. An American commentator has described Emerson's writings as "bundles of thoughts tied together with a title." The description is a happy one; but it is evidently not possible, from such a jumble of even the choicest materials, to formulate any systematic or philosophical reasoning.

The leading idea that pervades Emerson's writings is sound enough; the sentiments expressed are often forcible and just, and in accordance with many of our most cherished convictions; but they are marred by extravagance, and deprived of any practical value by a total disregard of the actual conditions of our existence. A still greater fault lies in the absence of disinterested sympathy, fellowship, or brotherly love, or even public spirit.

The views put forward of human nature have this defect—that they are not at all human, for they are utterly lacking in heart. Emerson would have us rear up and cultivate a personality which would leave us without teachers or advisers, friends or companions, loving ties or charitable obligations. The apparent tendency of his teaching is towards unyielding egotism. Self-reliance is one thing, and self-love is another; but Emerson has an unfortunate way of confounding them

together. And the result is not a success; for where a man's sense of independence would carry him beyond the bounds of a genial humanity, it would take him also beyond all that is sweetest, noblest, and worthiest in life.

It is not by isolated independence of spirit that the world will ever be rendered any better or happier, but rather by mutual dependence on one another and mutual concessions towards one another, which may stifle the innate selfishness of man in the loving embrace of a more universal fellowship.



## SIR THOMAS MORE'S "UTOPIA"

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THIS celebrated book, from its intrinsic merit, its boldness of conception, and breadth of view, is remarkable, in a still higher degree, from the period in which it was written. Europe was only emerging from the Dark Ages; our glorious literature had hardly sprung into existence; all the results of modern research, science, and liberal thought were still quite unknown when this book appeared, which at one bound reached the highest flights of speculation concerning ethical and political well-being, gave utterance to the noblest views concerning religious tolerance and liberty of thought, and propounded a scheme of an ideal commonwealth which has remained the model for all succeeding socialistic theories.

It is true that the author had Plato before him, and that he borrowed largely from the Greek; but he also broke into new ground, dealt fearlessly with the greatest problem of modern times, and advanced views which are to the fore in our own day. The gist of the whole work, the burden of the song throughout, is the abolition of personal property. According to the author—and his opinion has been shared by numerous speculative thinkers, both ancient and modern—personal property is the main source of evil and contention in the world.

The greed to acquire wealth, its corrupting influence, its unequal distribution, the oppressive laws for its protection, the class distinctions and the desperate struggles

which it engenders, together with much of the immorality, crime, and degradation which exist in the most highly civilised communities, arise from individual claims to property. The author therefore represented in his ideal commonwealth the principle of community of goods, which relieved the indigent, suppressed all luxury and waste, and remedied, as far as possible, the inequalities of nature. Under such a perfect government there were to be no drones and no superfluity. All members of the society were to do their fair quota of useful work, and to share equally in the results. Money was abolished, and all trade was regulated by the State for the general good.

The idea was not altogether a novel one, for personal property has existed in all ages; and in all ages some of the evils arising from its unequal distribution have been acutely realised and loudly denounced.

But if property is as old as original sin, it may also be said to have been fundamental to every species of civilisation—to have afforded the principal incentive, throughout all time, to commerce, industry, and progress. Wealth has been cursed by religion and denounced by philosophers; but it remains the main-stay of society. Indeed, according to some, government exists only for the protection of property. Nor can there be any doubt as to the fact that the power of wealth has gone on increasing from the most ancient times to the present day, and that it has reached tremendous proportions under the most modern developments. Money was always an important factor in the history of the world; but under the existing conditions of society it has become nearly all-powerful.

The wicked tyrant of old has grown to be an all-devouring monster that holds the world in bondage, and that demands, not obedience only, but worship. So that whatever evils Sir Thomas More attributed to the unequal

distribution of wealth in his own times have been intensified since in this age of millionaires.

Opposed to this malignant creation, however, there has arisen another monster, called Socialism, full of fierce and violent tendencies, and gathering under its standard the countless millions of the Have-nots. Capital may have to meet Labour in a death grapple. And the battle-cry of that coming struggle, which may well fill us with apprehension, is for that very principle of community of goods which has been so pleasantly exposed in the book before us. I do not propose, within the very restricted limits of this paper, to enter upon the merits of these important questions; my object is only to touch lightly on a few of the leading points of the book, and to expose certain grounds for doubt and dissent, on the principle that we should

rather bear the ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of.

The word "Utopia" is from the Greek, meaning "nowhere"; and the adjective "Utopian" has been accepted as quite an ordinary term, implying something ideal and chimerical. It may certainly be admitted at the start that almost insuperable difficulties would be encountered in the attempt, however made, to establish a commonwealth on Utopian principles. Nevertheless, it is not on the ground of impracticability that such a scheme of social and political regeneration should be assailed. An ideal, although unattainable under existing conditions, may yet offer a noble and desirable aim for our efforts towards improvement; and, moreover, it is indeed hard to say what is really impracticable, as the world goes. There have been numerous instances of institutions flourishing under peculiar circumstances that appear quite as strange and chimerical as anything narrated of Utopia.

I will allude only to a couple of examples which illustrate the two extremes—of absolute control of public and private life by the State on the one hand, and of complete personal freedom on the other. The first refers to the extraordinary institutions of Sparta, which lasted undisturbed for many centuries, and were the wonder of antiquity. The author of *Utopia* evidently had the laws of Lycurgus well in view when he designed his model commonwealth, although the object to be attained was altogether different. Under the Spartan *régime*, which was founded on slavery, the State was supreme in all matters, and the individual citizen existed only as an engine for warlike purposes and for sustaining the national life. Outside of the State he had neither ambition, personal interests, nor private wealth. Even his children were considered as public property, and were brought up under State direction. Gold was despised, commerce neglected, and all accumulation of riches restricted; while the members of the community were severely trained to abstinence, complete self-abnegation, stoical virtue, and heroic endurance. There were neither rich nor poor in Sparta among the citizens; all were brother-soldiers, except the free workers of the soil, who were disfranchised, and the helots, who were slaves and treated with systematic cruelty.

The second example illustrates an entirely different state of things, and is taken from the Quaker settlement in North America towards the latter end of the seventeenth century. It was termed "a holy experiment," and in some respects it was, indeed, a wonderful success. These "peculiar people" emigrated to a new and desolate country, which was inhabited by tribes of bloodthirsty Indians. In all the other settlements the conflict with the natives had been of a cruel, treacherous, and desperate character. The Quakers, however, went there quite

unarmed, and proclaimed their intention of living in peace and amity with all men, according to the Christian principle of doing to others as they would be done by. This must have been a novel message to the fiery Redskins; but, although they were only savages, they gave the new-comers a fair trial, and, finding them equal to their word—honest, gentle, and peaceable—they did not molest them. For over seventy years not a single murder by the Red Indians took place.

This almost surpasses the imagination of man, yet it is a well-recorded fact. The Quakers established a complete democracy, with absolute personal liberty. They tolerated all religions, in an age of intolerance; they interfered with no man's business, in an age of monopolies and restrictions. They were pious without priests, honest without prisons; they kept the peace without policemen, they dispensed justice without lawyers or magistrates, they protected themselves without an army. They made wonderful material progress, and enjoyed great prosperity; but after a time internal dissensions and the introduction of foreign elements affected their peculiar character, and made them like other people.

Nevertheless, the example remains, and shows that a community may thrive under conditions that are widely different from all recognised practices of government in the world.

It is, therefore, difficult to determine what may or may not be possible in the affairs of men. What we have to investigate is rather what is true and just; what we have to inquire into is whether the premises set forth are sound, and whether the conclusions drawn from them are warranted by experience.

Although it may be easy enough to design an ideal commonwealth, we have always to bear in mind that it cannot be peopled with ideal beings. Institutions can be

made to order; but, unfortunately, human nature cannot be so fashioned. That very complex, unreasonable, emotional, and often intractable creature called man is the stumbling-block to all such perfect systems.

First, as regards the premises. The author, in common with most academist philosophers who have dealt with this matter, has set forth a case which is open to the charge of great exaggeration. Society, as he depicts it, consists mainly of two distinct classes—the idle rich and the working poor. The rich are comparatively few in number, useless, proud, luxurious, and mostly wicked; the poor are numerous, oppressed, despised, reduced to the barest necessities of life, and doomed to a miserable old age. The many labour for the benefit of the few. The many suffer in order that the few may revel in riotous living. This aspect of the case has been frequently put forward; it has been a stock argument for ages, and it is quite untrue. Such a picture points only to the very extremes of the huge social fabric, and distorts even those extremes.

Among the rich there are many honest workers, who conduct enterprise, direct commerce, establish industry, and deserve well of the community. Among the poor there are many idle vagabonds, many useless and incompetent people, who are merely a charge on the community; many also have brought their misfortunes on themselves by folly, crime, and intemperance. There are drones on both sides. There is undoubtedly much extravagance and corruption among the rich; but it is ridiculous and most unfair to make sweeping distinctions merely on account of wealth. But apart from these extremes there is an immense middle-class, which controls society, but which the author leaves almost entirely out of account. This middle-class was a very important factor in the time of Henry VIII.; it comprised

the bone and sinew of the nation, a sturdy yeomanry, the whole class of the merchants and artisans, the tenant farmers, and the citizens.

The middle classes have since then enormously increased in numbers, in political power, and in wealth. The middle classes, at present, govern the nation, and their interests predominate over all other interests.

Then as to the distribution of wealth, according to the author, and according to his many followers on socialistic lines, the inequality is outrageous. A small minority is represented as controlling the bulk of the national wealth; but, as a matter of fact, such is by no means the case. It has been shown by statistics that in the leading nations of Europe the very rich—the millionaires—do not hold more than about a tenth of the total wealth. A tenth is far too much, and is out of all reasonable proportion to their number; such a state of things may be admitted to be a grave evil, but it is not nearly as bad as it has been represented to be. Then, again, the very poor do not constitute a large proportion of the community. In Great Britain the total number of inmates of poor-houses, and of persons receiving outdoor relief from the State, number only about three per cent. of the whole population; and Great Britain is worse off in that respect than most other countries. We have next to look at the results predicted from the proposed scheme, involving such a radical change in all existing social and political institutions.

The inherent weakness of all these ideal systems is that they entirely neglect the most important factor of all—human nature. The political theorist supplies cut-and-dried constitutions to suit all men, without the slightest regard to national tendencies and distinct temperaments. Institutions are supposed to control and fashion mankind, whereas it is mankind that

controls and fashions institutions. A system of government that may suit one race will utterly fail when applied to a different race, as witness the trial of Republican institutions in North and South America.

The political economist has grievously erred in the same way. He has framed elaborate principles of a so-called "science of sociology" to deal with a being that has no real existence; a sort of money-grubbing animal, which has been called the economic man. The real man, bad as he may be, is not all greed and egoism; he is largely influenced by sentiment in nearly all his doings, and not unfrequently governed by passion. Any system that leaves out sentiment is worthless for practical purposes. The author of *Utopia* sins gravely in this respect. With regard to marriage, for instance, we are informed that it is very strange and absurd that a man should exercise less discrimination in selecting a wife than in buying a horse. The Utopians are wiser in their generation, and they adopt a method of investigation which may well shock our sense of decency, and which is even beneath the practice of a savage. The answer to that sort of argument is, of course, that there is no analogy between the two cases. A wife is not to be regarded as an animal, and the mode of selection which is rightly applicable to a horse is in no respect suited to matrimony. It is much to be regretted that a strong materialistic tendency pervades the whole of this book. All the refined arts, excepting music, all æsthetic influences, all the higher aspirations of mankind, are ruthlessly sacrificed to material requirements. To eat plentifully, to digest well, to sleep long and soundly, and to work little, with a few other strictly regulated enjoyments, were evidently regarded by the Utopians as forming the sum-total of human happiness.

Perhaps the strongest objection that can be taken to

the Utopian system is the sacrifice it involves of the clearest right and highest blessing that man is heir to—that of personal freedom. Nothing can possibly compensate for the loss of liberty. This enormous sacrifice is supposed to be required for the public good; but, for my part, I do not consider that such a demand can be justified under any conditions. The public weal is a very questionable business; but concerning the deprivation of personal liberty there can be no doubt whatever. It is a real and certain wrong.

Under the Utopian *régime* there would of necessity be systematic and comprehensive slavery; an organised restriction of personal freedom compared to which the most despotic government in existence would afford delightful unrestraint. For, after all, under the most autocratic rule, a man can do pretty well as he likes, within reasonable bounds, providing he does not meddle with politics; but in Utopia he is not a free agent in any respect: he is chained to his allotted work, and controlled even in his private life.

Utopia is represented as a vast boarding establishment conducted on highly correct and moral principles, where all the inmates are held under strict supervision, well fed, plainly clad, properly drilled, and kept steadily to their task; the dirty work being done by another class of menials. Notwithstanding its many excellent regulations, I fear that Utopia must have been a very dull place to live in. There is no accounting for taste; some people might be happy there, but I can confidently state that it would not suit most of us.



## RUSKIN'S "FRONDES AGRESTES"

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ART is difficult to define; it is much more easy to understand, and readier still to feel. For art appeals mostly to our fancy and sentiment. We delight in the sensation of the beautiful, but without being able to analyse our feelings or determine precisely from what cause that pleasure arises. Thus art depends more on certain conditions of human nature than upon any fixed principles. A thing is pronounced to be "beautiful" because, under given circumstances, it pleases the sense of the beautiful in man; but that sense is subject to temperament, to age, and to education. It has had its periods of extraordinary activity in the history of mankind, and has gone through endless developments. It is generally admitted that the fine arts have a certain foundation in nature; that they draw their inspiration from natural types, and from associations and harmonies that are in keeping with the wants, desires, affections, and aspirations of our being.

The fine arts, therefore, have some stable base to stand upon; but it is not so with what we call *taste*. Here we have no guide beyond individual liking and the rule of fashion. There is no accounting for taste; there is no recognised criterion by which to test it; there are no known means of making it amenable even to common sense. If we take dress as an example, we find the utmost extravagance, combined with inutility, unsightliness, and even repulsive deformity, prevailing at times

The canon of taste of one age is the laughing-stock of a succeeding one. Not only as regards outward appearances, but in matters of vital importance to health and bodily comfort, does popular taste often sin most egregiously, and with results that can only be considered as most deplorable. There never has been, nor ever can be, a lasting standard of good taste.

When, therefore, Ruskin, in the opening lines of the book before us, alludes to *perfect taste* as "the faculty of receiving the greatest possible pleasure from those material sources which are attractive to our moral nature in its purity and perfection," he indulges in one of those vague definitions that define nothing, or else he alludes to taste in a very different sense to the one in which it is generally understood.

Then why limit taste to "material sources"? Poetry, eloquence, music, are not material things; and yet surely they are subjects for the exercise of the most refined and cultured taste.

Of late years it has been attempted to turn æsthetics into a science—everything is dubbed scientific now-a-days—but I am not aware that the slightest benefit has accrued to art through that endeavour. Nor am I inclined to think that much advantage is to be derived from reading elaborate treatises on the principles of art, or criticisms on works of art. I have read an interesting volume on Wagner, but I cannot say that I was enabled to appreciate his music any the better on that account.

There are works of art that are much admired in some quarters, and that bring fabulous prices, which I positively dislike. It is a matter of taste. *Chacun à son gout, and let it rest there.*

Among the English art critics of the last fifty years Ruskin holds a foremost place, and his merit is of a very superior order. His work also rises much above the

level of ordinary criticism. It is certainly not tainted with science, although he always cherished the idea that he could reduce his fervid and lofty imaginings into a system, and wished to appear more as a teacher than a poet. But a poet he was, in the best sense of the word; and the great charm of his writings consists in their exalted and poetical character. The dominant note in Ruskin's composition is his intense love of nature and his truly artistic appreciation of beautiful ideals and scenic effects.

His powers of description in this respect are almost unrivalled—he has a wealth of language, a magnificence of imagery, a glowing fervour of admiration, and an exquisite gift of expression that place him at once among the finest prose writers of his age. He was himself a painter by profession; and although he never attained any eminence in the practice of the art, yet he was a diligent and impassioned student, and soon became an excellent judge in the domain of æsthetics, but only within a limited sphere. Ruskin's ideal temperament inclined him to the highly poetical aspect of art only; he could revel in the works of the great Italian painters, but he does not seem to have shown any liking or any just appreciation for the Dutch school.

Realism had no charm for him. Ruskin found his *beau ideal* in Turner, and the name of that gifted, but fanciful and erratic, genius became with him a sort of fetish. Ruskin is said to have *made* Turner; and in some respects Turner may be said to have *made* Ruskin. He certainly afforded the enthusiastic young art critic an inexhaustible field for his labour of love. Yet Ruskin did good service to art in weaning popular favour from old-fashioned and conventional types of beauty, and directing attention to those natural sources of loveliness in landscape which the great English painter was able

to draw upon with such marvellous effect. The message which Ruskin had to deliver to the world was a just appreciation of natural charms, as against the more artificial representations that were formerly in vogue. And no one could have delivered that message in more impassioned and eloquent language.

But although Ruskin takes upon himself to inform and instruct the readers in dealing with natural phenomena and aspects, yet the bent of his genius always points to a lofty idealism and to the poetical view. Thus, in the present volume, on the chapter about the sky, he asks the question: "Has the reader any distinct idea of what clouds are?" Then he proceeds, in a superb passage, to describe their appearance to his artistic eye. The following is a short quotation:—

Or those war-clouds that gather on the horizon, dragon-crested, tongued with fire, how is their barbed strength bridled? What bits are those they are champing with their vaporous lips, flinging off flakes of black foam? Leagued leviathans of the Sea of Heaven—out of their nostrils goeth smoke, and their eyes are like the eyelids of the morning; the sword of him that layeth at them cannot hold a spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. Where ride the captains of their armies? Where are set the measures of their march? Fierce murmurers, answering each other from morning until evening—what rebuke is this that has awed them into peace—what hand has reined them back by the way in which they came?

This is equal to Shelley; but it is not meteorological in the least. As a picture it is Turneresque, by which I mean that it is so imbued with latent imagination as to inspire the reader with fantastic and sublime emotions. Underlying all Ruskin's effusions there is a deeply religious spirit. Nature to him is divine. It indicates the handiwork of the Creator; it is the mirror in which we can see darkly the holy presence. His ecstasy in the contemplation of the glories of the universe is

allied to worship; his noblest declamation conceals a prayer.

It is to be regretted that so good and so distinguished a man should have mistaken his vocation, and so misunderstood his undoubted powers. At an early period in his artistic career he neglected the field in which he might have done excellent work, and, to use his own words, "resolutely began to set the world to rights."

This is admittedly a difficult and extensive task; but of all the people to tackle it, in the modern political-economical sense, poets and rhapsodists are about the worst. Ruskin could shine as a preacher; he was capable of inculcating refined and elevated notions of art, and his principles of morals were sound and healthy. His feelings were inspired by an earnest piety; his intentions were always noble and good. But as a social reformer he only made himself ridiculous, and his doctrines concerning questions of politics, administration, and economy have no practical value. It is to be noticed also that the moment he leaves the domain of art, where he shines to such advantage and plunges into ethics and moral philosophy, his style loses much of its point and clearness and becomes at times bombastical and turgid.

In the beginning of the book we have before us there is a long paragraph about the ordinances of the Almighty. In a note to the above Ruskin states: "The *practical* contents of the sentence are good—if only they are intelligible, which I doubt." Personally, I may state that I have no doubt whatever on the subject, for, having read the sentence referred to several times over, I have come to the conclusion that it has no definite meaning at all.

There is another great objection to the teaching of such doctrinaires, which is that they assume a great deal

too much. They take what they think *ought to be* for what is, whereas it is generally quite the opposite. Thus we have the following (*Principles of Art*) :—

It is the common consent of men that whatever branch of any pursuit ministers to the bodily comforts and regards material uses is ignoble ; and whatever part is addressed to the mind only is noble ; and that geology does better in reclothing dry bones and revealing lost creations than in tracing veins of lead and beds of iron ; astronomy better, in opening to us the houses of heaven than in teaching navigation ; botany better, in displaying structure than in expressing prices ; surgery better, in investigating organisation than in setting limbs.

Now, this is just what "the common consent of men," at the present time, does *not* say. The philosophers of antiquity used to talk in that strain, but the whole tenour of modern investigation and opinion has been in an opposite direction.

We live in a thoroughly utilitarian age—whether for good or for evil is quite another question ; but a man like Ruskin, with his æsthetic ideals, lived out of the commonplace world ; he was not in touch with sordid humanity, he belonged to quite another age. He could see glories in the clouds ; but he was evidently not conversant with the degrading fact that the whole modern idea of progress has *not* been to elevate humanity, but to feed it, and clothe it, and house it better—to make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before.

*Frondes Agrestes*, in one sense, is a very unsatisfactory book, inasmuch as it is a bundle of extracts from a larger and more important work. I have read only a portion of the original book, which was first published a great many years ago, and at a prohibitive price. It was a peculiarity of the author's to charge very high prices for his books, on the ground that people appreciated most what cost them most. The system may have its

advantages, but in the case of Ruskin the experiment was not financially a success. Indeed, it was said that he nearly ruined himself—and he was a rich man—in the publication of his books.

The author had resolutely refused to republish the book as a whole, partly because it was in praise of excellence, "which the public will never give the labour necessary to discern." This shows that Ruskin did not trust himself in the endeavour to appreciate the public taste; he knew well that he was speaking above the heads of the great majority of his hearers. The selection embodied in *Frondes Agrestes* was not made by him, but by a lady friend; he gladly relied upon her judgment. But a short selection can only give a partial and feeble idea of the whole work; moreover, the paragraphs are for the most part disconnected.

The book is divided into nine sections. The first one deals with the "Principles of Art"; it is very short, and barely touches on the subject at all. The next section, on "The Power and Office of Imagination," is fuller, and in some respects better; but it contains too much rhapsody to afford it any real value, or any but a remote bearing on art. The following five chapters are illustrative of the artistic beauties of the sky, streams and sea, mountains, stones, plants and flowers. Here we have Ruskin at his best, and in his true element. Many of the extracts are in his finest style, and charm us by the vividness of his fancy, the exquisite art of his expression, and the fervour of his eloquence. But when he departs from the poetical aspect of the subject, and tries to expound the design of creation, or to dabble in scientific reaching, his work is of much less value, while in places he discourses absolute nonsense.

Of this fact he seems to have been partially aware himself in his maturer years; and every allowance

should be made for that youthful fervour which, while it led to error as to facts, yet inspired his writings with so much noble and pious enthusiasm.

The two concluding sections deal with Education and Moralities ; in neither of which subjects does the author shine, although they contain some fine outbursts and are imbued with a deeply religious feeling.

The weak points about all Ruskin's writings are his vagueness and his discursiveness ; and these defects are rendered more apparent by his assumption of precise knowledge where he was only dreaming, and his great belief in science and system, both of which were entirely foreign to his nature. It is almost ludicrous to find him describing himself (in a footnote) as "intensely rational and orderly." But these blemishes and inconsistencies cannot diminish his lustre as a splendid writer, nor depreciate his excellent taste as a critic of imaginative art.

## IBSEN'S "HADDA GABBLER"

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THE novelty of the Ibsen drama has already worn off, and one cannot but smile at the tremendous fuss that was made over its first introduction on the English stage. The controversy is not extinct, but it is no longer carried on with ardour or virulence. About thirty years ago the conflict of opinion was at its height; and it is said that cards of invitation to social gatherings in London, on some occasions, were crossed with the intimation, "*Doll's House* not to be discussed." We have long passed that stage now; but there is still a wide difference of opinion, especially among the professional critics, as to the merits of this great dramatic departure. It occurred once that one of our leading illustrated papers in England gave a double report of one of Ibsen's plays—the first highly adulatory, the other most damning. On the one side of the page the extraordinary excellence of the piece, its powerful exposition of some new phase of human nature, its depth of pathos, its thrilling situations, and high moral teaching of a novel order, were commented upon in a most fervid and exalted strain; while on the opposite side—in parallel columns—the whole play was held up to scorn and ridicule, declared to be wanting in every element of dramatic interest, wildly extravagant in conception, morbid in tone, of a sickly and perverted morality, grossly objectionable to good taste, and, last but not least, insufferably dull.

So the great British public could have its choice, and be gratified either way. Neither party could complain that its views were not properly represented.

It is not apparent at the first glance, and on merely reading these dramas, why they should have produced such an explosion of public feeling. They contain nothing as startling as one might have been led to suppose from all the hubbub that was made about them. Moreover, they deal largely in ideas and speculations that are not at all popular, neither do they meet the popular demand for lively and exciting entertainment. On the Continent of Europe the Ibsen drama does not seem to have made much headway, and in France it appears to have fallen absolutely flat.

The notable Zola, when questioned on the subject, is reported to have pronounced Ibsen to be *très obscur*; and that is sufficient, on the French stage, to relegate him to total obscurity. *Très obscur* Ibsen certainly often is. To see clearly through him one needs a measure of previous enlightenment. To appreciate his work one has to rise to his level; and this, for many of us, is a pretty stiff climb. Indeed, it is a question whether the view from that exalted eminence repays one for all the trouble and exertion of getting there. It is much the same with many of the sublimities of modern poetry, which are lost to the ordinary reader for the simple reason that he cannot in the least make out what it is all about.

For my part, I confess, in all humility, that I prefer language that can be readily understood. It is a vulgar taste, a sign of mental inferiority, perhaps, and possibly an unreasonable expectation; but such is the fact, and I rarely find the time or the inclination to grope about in the dark after an author's meaning. In the case of Ibsen's dramas, however, the obscurity is not of this

provoking sort ; it does not lie in the style, but rather in the author's intention. Nor can it be maintained that the opposition to his doctrine arises from its being misunderstood.

The outcry is due to quite another cause. Ibsen has been furiously denounced, and is so still, because he is at variance with old-established ideas—because he breaks through recognised dramatic rules, and also runs counter to the accepted canons of British taste. His drama was not only new, but revolutionary ; it was a breach of decorum, and was deemed by one section of the community to be subversive of public morality. On this point I do not wish to offer an opinion ; but, apart from the moral aspect, it can hardly be denied that Ibsen has done, especially for the British drama, a great deal of good. He has brought about a change, and a change was badly needed. For, by universal consent, the British drama had degenerated to a deplorable extent. It had sunk so low that it was highly desirable that some new life should be instilled into its decrepit constitution. That distinguished dramatic critic, William Hazlitt, writing some seventy years ago on the dearth of modern comedies, accounted for the falling off in a department of literature where England had formerly won such glorious laurels on the ground that the field had been exhausted. "Comedy," he wrote, "naturally wears itself out—destroys the very food on which it lives—and, by constantly and successfully exposing the follies and weaknesses of mankind to ridicule, in the end leaves itself nothing worth laughing at."

If this assumption is correct, then we are driven to the conclusion that the field of English comedy must have been a very narrow one. And such, as a matter of fact, it certainly was. Hemmed in on all sides by conventional restraints, and regulated by conventional rules of

propriety, it had drifted into the most dreary platitudes, and had lost all colour of originality. For a past century the principal business of the English playwright had been to poach on his neighbour's preserves, and, under miserable shifts and disguises, to adopt French plays for the London stage. It required a revolution to overcome this old-fashioned system, to break through these artificial barriers, and by such means to widen the field for the modern drama. And this useful result, which has only of late years been successfully accomplished, is to no small extent due to the introduction of the Ibsen drama.

Ibsen has been one of the first to bring about an entire departure from the old-established models, to widen the scope, and to introduce a new element into the modern drama. He has been the forerunner, and others have not been backward to follow in his footsteps. At the present day a new style of comedy has been placed before the public, and received with applause, which only thirty years ago could not even have been produced. It is not my intention to attempt any description of this new school, or to dwell, however briefly, on its leading features, for that topic would carry me much too far; but I shall confine myself to a very cursory review of *Hadda Gabbler*, a piece which is still often before the public.

In this play, as in most of Ibsen's productions for the stage, the plot is of the simplest description; the characters represent middle-class people of the ordinary Norwegian types, the incidents are for the most part just every-day occurrences, and the dialogue is strictly realistic. There is no striving after brilliancy or sensational effect, and the humorous element is principally conspicuous by its absence. The author also complies strictly with old rules of unities of time and place, mostly discarded on the English stage. The action

takes place throughout in the one room, and the period involved in the whole play barely covers two days.

The opening scene reveals the circumstances of the return to his home in Christiana of a literary student, Jørgen Tesman, with his bride, Hadda, after their honeymoon trip in Southern Europe. Tesman is represented as a vacillating, fidgety, and finikin young man, of no strength of mind or force of character, but plodding and industrious—a literary prig and a respectable bore. He is stupidly infatuated with his handsome young wife, and as blind as a bat to her real character.

Hadda is the personage of the play, and she is a real enigma; yet she is very candid in speaking about herself, and she does not attempt to shroud her motives in any sort of mystery. She is also remarkably frank about her past life. From the opening scene she shows herself thoroughly selfish, false, spiteful, worldly, designing, cynical, and utterly heartless; but there is a depth of malevolence in some of her actions which is hardly conceivable, and which appears only towards the end of the play.

One of the first visitors to the newly-arrived couple is Mm. Elvsted, a poor-spirited, delicate, timid, and highly nervous lady, who had been at school with Hadda, and is an old friend of the family. She comes to make a piteous appeal on behalf of a mutual friend, Eilert Löyborg, who is the real hero of the play. This is a very unsteady young man, of some genius, who had formerly led a wild and dissipated life, but had been reformed by Mm. Elvsted, and induced through her good influence to regulate his conduct and apply himself to literature. He has just published a book which has brought him fame, and he has written a sequel to it, which is still in manuscript, and which contains his highest achievement. This is to be his masterpiece; and

as it has been composed with the help and under the inspiration of Mm. Elvsted, it is quite natural that she should take a great pride and interest in it. She calls it "our child." This highly-strung, wayward, passionate, and flighty young man, deplorably deficient in moral ballast, had been very much enamoured of Hadda Gabbler, who had encouraged his addresses to a dangerous extent, without really responding to his love. At least, that is the conclusion one is led to by the heartless character of the woman [who is depicted as deficient in passion and incapable of any warmth of sympathy.]

But Hadda Gabbler takes a malignant interest in the subject that the timid and well-meaning Mm. Elvsted has so much at heart; [she attaches herself to the latter, insinuates herself in the most crafty manner into her confidence, and extracts from her a full confession of her infatuation for the talented libertine. In the second act — Lövborg appears on the scene; he renews his protestations of undying attachment to Hadda, expresses his misery at finding her married, and reminds her of old times. Hadda plays with his emotions, leads him on, and then repulses him; while inducing him to confide all his hopes and aspirations to her, his good resolutions, and his future prospects. She then sets herself deliberately to mar them all, and to undo the good which her rival, Mm. Elvsted, had effected. This she accomplishes with complete success, and in a surprisingly short space of time.]

At her wicked instigation, and urged on by her taunts and sneers, Lövborg joins a festive gathering, falls once more into his besetting sin, relapses into reckless dissipation, and manages to utterly disgrace himself and to ruin his reputation. While revelling in a drunken spree, he drops his precious manuscript, which is picked up by his friend Tesman, and falls into the hands of Hadda. By

her it is consigned to the flames. Löborg reappears, crushed, disgraced, and broken-hearted. Hadda completes his despair, and as a parting gift, when turning him out of doors, she presents him with one of her father's pistols, with the intimation that there is nothing left for him to do but to put an end to himself. Only she implores him to do it *gracefully*; for Hadda cultivates an artistic taste, and has a great idea of the beautiful. When, therefore, she learns shortly afterwards that her former suitor attempted his life in a most clumsy and unbecoming manner, she is much shocked. The news that he shot himself in the stomach, instead of gallantly blowing out his brains, is a cruel blow to her æsthetic sense. In addition to this grievous disappointment, she also hears that there is a possibility of a scandal arising from this suicide, and of her name being dragged into it. She has not the courage to face this trial, and being, moreover, thoroughly bored with things in general and dissatisfied with her surroundings, she quietly determines to make an end of it all. So she retires into the next apartment; a pistol-shot is heard; there is a rush to her rescue, and an outcry, for the heroine is found reclining gracefully on the sofa with a bullet through her temple. And so ends this comic tragedy.

The question will naturally be asked, "Is all this natural?" That is a very difficult question to answer, for there are mysterious depths and amazing intricacies in human nature that may baffle the most discriminating inquiry. Human nature is, indeed, often incomprehensible when tested by reason, or when referred to reasonable motives.

In physical nature it is usual to take for granted that there cannot be an effect without a cause, and in human conduct it is usual to attribute every action to some sensible motive. But it is very doubtful whether such

a rule can always be applied. In the case of Hadda Gabbler the difficulty lies in finding any sensible motive for her extraordinary and, it might be said, inhuman action. [It is hard to understand why she should have acted as she did. She had nothing to gain by it; she had no purpose to serve. The principle of a ruling passion cannot be applied to her, for she is a sort of passionless creature;] nor is there anything to show that she was deeply moved in the matter. Love and hatred, envy, avarice, ambition, jealousy, afford some of the most usual causes of tragical events; but none of these motives can properly be assigned to Hadda.

Iago is the most devilish impersonation that Shakespeare has given us; but Iago is not only instigated by detestation of the Moor, but also by revenge for a fancied wrong. But Hadda had positively no cause for her fiendish malignity. She is not represented as cherishing any antipathy towards her former lover; she has no wrong to avenge. Her enmity can hardly be attributed to jealousy, because she has no one to be jealous of. Mm. Elvsted never wronged her in thought or action. The latter's attachment to Lövborg amounted to little more than friendly sympathy—the two had been thrown much together, and had worked at a common object, but there had been no love passages between them. Moreover Hadda is not in love with Lövborg, nor ever had been, according to the story; she displays no sympathy for him, or the slightest concern for his welfare. On the contrary, she shows herself from the first only intent on leading him astray. It is necessary, therefore, to look for some other explanation, and this leads me to one of the distinct features of the realistic school, of which Ibsen is one of the ablest and most remarkable exponents. For it must be borne in mind that the eminent Norwegian is not only a poet and a dramatist,

but also a philosopher of a very modern type, and a deep student of some of the most occult problems of human nature.

There has been a wide departure of late years from many of the old-established theories regarding the constitution of the mind of man, and especially of the forces that prompt his actions. Formerly, the view held, and it has generally been accepted in England since the time of Locke, that the creature man is mainly affected by outside influences; in fact, that he is, to all intents and purposes, a creature of circumstance. The condition of his moral being was supposed to depend on his surroundings; his thoughts and sentiments were believed to be fostered almost entirely by education, and to be regulated by his material requirements.

The mind of a child was often represented as a blank sheet of paper upon which any figures could be traced or impressions made, that might afterwards be enlarged and developed into a matured character. Thus vice and depravity were generally put down to defective training or to evil associations. The later philosophy, however, entirely discards this idea, and holds that a man's character and disposition are innate—that he is born with strong moral tendencies that influence his conduct and bearing in after life, and to a great extent control his destiny. The leading principle is that of heredity, and according to this system of ethics a man is no more personally responsible for the features of his character than he is for those of his countenance or the colour of his hair.

Now, Ibsen has shown himself a firm believer in the doctrine of heredity, and with him the causes for good and evil in human nature spring from hidden and spiritual depths, which often do not admit of being traced to outward causes. According to his view,

therefore, [an action need not be due to any particular motive, but may follow from the natural constitution of the agent.] A bad boy, for instance, will trip up a blind beggar, and scatter the contents of his alms-box, not for the purpose of robbing him, but out of sheer maliciousness, to witness the struggles and distress of the poor wretch in his vain efforts to pick up his lost treasure. A good-hearted boy will deprive himself of some little treat to deposit his pennies in the same alms-box, and derive equal gratification of another sort from the thanks of the afflicted cripple. In both cases the impulse is innate, and cannot be attributed to any outward cause.

Now, the character of Hadda Gabbler appears to me to come under [this category of innate depravity of heart.] She is wicked, cruel, and malicious, because it is her nature so to be; we need not look for any ostensible motive. Her conduct is simply the outcome of a fiendish disposition. Human nature generally exhibits a curious and ever-varying admixture of good and evil; both elements, although very unequally distributed, are mostly present in each individual. A human being absolutely good or wholly bad is an anomaly, something outside of all ordinary experience.

Such a being must, therefore, be looked upon either as impossible or as a monster. In Hadda Gabbler the author would appear to have attempted depicting such a being—one wholly malevolent and without any counter-balancing influence whatever. She is presented to us as a type of evil. She is depicted as devoid of every trace of tenderness or sympathy; she is devoid even of passion; she is as cold as she is malignant. It is, therefore, useless attempting to explain her conduct by the natural play of cause and effect, or searching for any particular motive for any particular act. She is a motive

unto herself. She is simply the incarnation of the evil principle in human nature, and that is *my* explanation of this apparent enigma. There is but one other influence that has controlled her, and to some extent mitigated her evil tendencies, and that is fear. Hadda is an abject coward. Self-considerations and the dread of consequences alone hold her in check. She is not frail, but cautiously timid—"willing to wound and yet afraid to strike." Thus her former life is not represented as having been wicked. She is not a vicious woman, but the impersonation of viciousness. She has not a spark of morality in her nature; but she has behaved with due propriety out of regard for appearances, and also because she is incapable of any tender passion. [She discards contemptuously the idea of unfaithfulness, because sentimental weakness has no attraction for her.] She is constitutionally incapable of loving any living creature; but she has unlimited hatred at her disposal in the form of potential energy, ready to burst loose on the slightest provocation. Apart, however, from this absolute and aggressive badness of heart, Hadda is intellectually a refined and accomplished person. She is bright, clever, showy, and even fascinating in some respects. She has also a strong artistic sense, cultivates a poetical temperament, is ambitious for distinction, and ardent for praise and admiration. [Being denied these opportunities, she languishes in resentful *ennui*, and expresses herself disgusted with life.]

Her tragic end is as unnatural as all the rest of her doings. It cannot be explained by natural laws, for she is outside of them. But, whatever may be thought of the plot, and of this one extraordinary delineation of character, there is a deep meaning and much literary merit attached to the piece. It is a drama, not truly of real life, but animated and sustained by a strong realistic

spirit throughout. It has the one serious fault of obscurity, and it shows a straining after some abstruse conceptions of human nature which fall outside of our practical experience of life, and which do not even aim at an interesting or beautiful ideal.

## MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS

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IN his brilliant essay on Bacon, Macaulay drew a striking parallel between the ancient philosophy of the Greeks and the modern scientific method, and his conclusions are all in favour of the latter. The comparison, however, is not a just one, nor does it point to any legitimate conclusion, because the two systems have very little in common, and they apply to opposite sides of human nature.

The ancient philosophy dealt almost exclusively with the spiritual and moral aspirations of man; while modern science, which is almost outside the domain of true philosophy, is mostly concerned with the knowledge of material things. There is no need of disparaging the first in order to duly appreciate the second. It is not the business of a great moral teacher to concern himself with the work of perfecting labour-saving machinery. Even should he be carried away by his exalted conceptions into expressing some disdain for merely mechanical contrivances, that would be no valid reason for assailing him with sneers and invectives for his lack of practical utility. It is reported of Carlyle that in one of his fits of depression he remarked that he would have done better to have made boots than to have written his finest works; but I doubt whether many people, even of the most utilitarian convictions, would be found to endorse that sorry opinion. *A propos de bottes*, Macaulay writes,

in the same essay: "For our part, if we are forced to make our choice between the first shoemaker and the author of the three books on Anger, we pronounce for the shoemaker. It may be worse to be angry than to be wet. But shoes have kept millions from being wet; and we doubt whether Seneca ever kept anybody from being angry." This style of writing may be considered forcible and epigrammatic; but it is very shallow, and it implies the belief that moral teaching is ineffective to do any practical good in this world, which is glaringly false. It would be very easy to multiply illustrations of this sort, and to show how ridiculous they are. For instance, John Milton wrote a fine poem, in twelve books, to "justify the ways of God to men." Henry Archer invented a machine for perforating sheets of postage stamps. Now, it is certainly more important to understand the ways of Providence than to be saved a little trouble in separating stamps, at the risk of cutting one's fingers in so doing; but very few people read *Paradise Lost*, and we much doubt whether any of those who do are a bit the wiser concerning the matter than they were before; whereas scores of millions of people continue to use postage stamps, and are saved time, inconvenience, and probably much profane swearing, through the sheets being perforated. Therefore it is evident that Henry Archer is to be preferred to John Milton, and has done more good. Of course, much turns on the particular meaning we attach to the term "good." It has been wittily remarked of Macaulay that he generally uses the word in the sense of something "good to eat," and in that respect his taste was entirely in accord with the common idea. "The aim of the Platonic philosophy," he wrote, "was to raise us above vulgar wants. The aim of the Baconian philosophy was to supply our vulgar wants." And he much preferred the latter.

But the aim of the ancient Greek philosophers was something much more than that. It was to raise the moral and intellectual standard of men, to inculcate noble and virtuous principles, to teach temperance and self-denial, and to attain to true happiness.

These were noble and exalted ideas ; but, according to our brilliant historian, they were "impossible," and only ended in "fruitless wisdom." Let them, then, be judged by results. The most complete answer to such sneers and charges of barrenness can be produced in such a shining example as the subject of this study — the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

This excellent and distinguished man, although not born to the purple, was at an early age adopted by that virtuous Prince Antoninus Pius, and destined to the throne of the mightiest empire that the world has ever seen. The young man was therefore trained to the idea of sovereignty, and was subject to all the indulgences and temptations which naturally surround such an eminent position. But he steeled his soul against all evil influences, and showed himself in every respect worthy of the immense trust imposed upon him. He was of an earnest, thoughtful, and affectionate disposition, and by nature inclined to virtue. He cultivated philosophy with almost a religious fervour. For it must be borne in mind that philosophy, to the ancients, was a kind of spiritual religion, in striking contrast to the brutish superstitions and abject observances of the Pagan popular worship. Philosophy afforded the only elevating influence to the enlightened class. It was, indeed, unfitted for, and unequal to, the task of regenerating the ignorant masses, or of raising the moral standard of the people ; but it afforded an important and active incentive to good, a high moral tone, and a consolation to the initiated. In those times of utter degeneracy, before the

advent of Christianity, philosophy might truly be said to have supplied the salt of the earth, which preserved society from putrefaction. It was perhaps the noblest effort ever made by the human mind, by the light of reason alone, to seek out and develop a system of pure ethics, and turn men's minds to exalted ideas and to virtuous action.

Nor can it be doubted for a moment that the intellectual and moral training he received had a most powerful effect on his mind and character, and attached him to those excellent principles to which he rigidly adhered all his life. In his *Meditations* he frequently refers to this fact, and gives full credit to his teachers as well as to the worthy example of his adopted father.

There were several distinct schools of philosophy in those days, holding very different views on matters of very small importance, and disputing among themselves with virulence on theories of cosmology upon which they were all equally ignorant; but in their systems of morality they were pretty well agreed. They all regarded virtue as the supreme good; and they all sought for that good, not in doctrines and fine phrases, as Macaulay would have us believe, but in action and the conduct of life. Had Marcus Aurelius been a Cynic, or a Peripatetic, or even an Epicurean, he would have held different opinions as to the purpose of life or the ultimate end of things; but he would have followed much the same road, and have cherished the same exalted and benevolent sentiments.

As it was, he attached himself to the sect of Stoics, towards which he felt the most sympathy. He donned their particular dress, practised their rigid discipline, inured himself to self-denial and privations, and applied himself assiduously to the study of their great teachers,

among whom his favourite author seems to have been Epictetus.

Marcus Aurelius was proclaimed emperor at the age of forty, and he was the absolute master of the whole civilised world for nineteen years. During that period the internal peace of the vast empire was well maintained, but there was much trouble at the frontiers. The warlike Parthians threatened in the east, and the turbulent Goths invaded from the north. The emperor, who never spared himself, and was ever ready to confront danger, was on several occasions engaged in serious wars, and distinguished himself as a general.

A still worse evil afflicted the empire in a terrible epidemic of the plague. The cares of administration were heavy and ceaseless ; but he never skirted them nor complained, but strove manfully to the last to fulfil his task, and to perform his duty as a devoted servant of the public. He died in harness in 180 A.D.

Marcus Aurelius has been called "the noblest of the Pagans." Personally, I am not favourable to the lavish use of superlatives in describing the characteristics of frail humanity ; nor do I consider it necessary, in doing justice to eminent virtue, to fly off into wild ecstasies of impassioned eulogy. Some distinguished authors, like Renan, will not admit that even the shadow of blame can rest upon his transcendent fame ; but I must humbly differ from that view. In my opinion, this really great and good man was not perfect ; and, although his private virtues may deserve all praise, his conduct as a public man was open to severe blame, and was productive of a terrible disaster. Undoubtedly he meant well, and strove earnestly to do his duty according to his lights ; but he was weak, especially where his personal affections were concerned. He would never make the slightest sacrifice for himself ; but he sacrificed the whole empire

in a blind infatuation for a most vicious son. The first mistake that the emperor made was, at the very start, in associating with himself on the throne, and with equal powers, his adopted brother, Lucius Verus, a man of depraved character and of no particular ability. The partnership, fortunately, did not last long, and Verus fell a victim to the plague ; but the risk had been great to the public weal. Marcus Aurelius was also very unfortunate in his domestic connections, for his wife, the beautiful and accomplished Faustina, became the most abandoned of her sex, and was notoriously scandalous, even in those scandalous times. Her husband, who was much attached to her, remained stone-blind to her shocking depravity—he even praises her in his *Meditations* as “obedient and affectionate and removed from luxury,” for which blessing he devoutly thanks the gods. For this, as a private individual, he may be held blameless, but hardly so as an emperor.

A cruel persecution of the Christians occurred during this reign, and thousands of innocent people were butchered under circumstances of revolting cruelty. The panegyrists of the Emperor have spared no ingenuity in the fruitless endeavour to account for this deplorable event, and to exculpate their hero from the blame attached to it. Their excuses, however, made the matter only worse. It has been stated that Marcus knew very little about the Christians, and cared less. As a fact, he had every opportunity afforded him of knowing all about them, for it was during the previous reign, when he was associated with the government, that Justin Martyr submitted to the Emperor his noble apology for the Christians, and successfully defended them from false charges and vile calumnies. That virtuous prince, Antoninus Pius, stopped the persecutions, and his example, which was so clear to his

successor, ought surely to have been followed in this instance.

It has also been pleaded that the persecutions were more political than religious; but, apart from the consideration that this would afford no excuse for such atrocities, the statement is not in accordance with fact.

At a previous period, during the war against the Jews, there may have been a political motive; and at a much later period, when the old empire was in disruption and frantic efforts were being made to uphold the ancient institutions, the strokes aimed at the growing power of the Christian community can thus be accounted for; but there were no such disturbing influences at work during the peaceful reign of Marcus Aurelius. A profound internal tranquillity had existed for several generations, and the administration had nothing to fear from the people. The army alone was a standing source of danger.

To me it seems clear that the persecutions arose from the animosity of the lower populace against the new sect. Previous emperors had restrained this bloodthirsty fury with a strong arm; but the amiable and easy-going Prince, who was so much engrossed with his philosophical speculations, lacked the necessary firmness and strength of character to exert his powers in this direction.

Apparently he did not instigate the persecutions, but he allowed them considerable latitude. In certain regions where the popular fury ran high the Christians were ruthlessly slaughtered; while in other places they were left quite unmolested. This shows clearly that the action could not have been directed by political motives.

But the worst action of the Emperor's life was the one he did in leaving it. It was the most deplorable termination to a noble and in most respects glorious

career, for he transmitted the supreme power to one of the most depraved, cruel, and abandoned wretches that ever afflicted suffering humanity, in his son Commodus. That young man, who had such a pleasing exterior, was already well known for his vicious instincts and his bad associations, and it was an act of criminal blindness in the father to have appointed such a one to the throne. The previous four emperors had shown the utmost discretion and a pure patriotism in regulating the succession to the supreme dignity, which was not hereditary; and this method of selection, having regard to merit, had given the most splendid results. Marcus Aurelius departed from that excellent example, and, blinded by paternal affection, left the government of the civilised world to a monster. These considerations would go to show that a most virtuous and intelligent man may not always act as a wise monarch; indeed, the business of philosophy and that of kingcraft stand widely apart, and it is to the imperishable credit of this truly noble and loveable Prince that he proved them not to be incompatible.

Hence his fame. There have been much greater rulers, there have been far more distinguished philosophers, than Marcus Aurelius; but there has never been a man in history who combined the two professions more worthily. He remains the unsurpassed type of the Emperor-philosopher. When we turn to his *Meditations*, we are affected more with sympathy and delight than struck with admiration. Their priceless merit consists in their innate goodness and loveable sincerity. They are not a mere collection of grave thoughts, or ethical subjects, or moral reflections, although they abound in these; they are essentially the rules of a blameless life, inspiring themes to virtuous action. They represent the mainspring that constantly urged an earnest man on the

path of duty. They supply the reasons that constantly sustained him in his trials and consoled him in adversity and affliction. They have their rise, not out of doctrines, but out of daily practice. The dominant note to these *Meditations*, the purpose that is ever present in them, is the idea of duty.

The sentiment that inspires them is a profoundly religious one. In this latter respect the book flatly contradicts the prevailing idea, that the Stoical philosophy was necessarily of a materialistic character. Some of the cosmical theories propounded by the leading teachers show a tendency that way, but there can be no doubt as to their firm belief in the spiritual nature of the universe and the guidance of a Divine Providence. On that point the *Meditations* speak out with no uncertain voice. Nor is the God of the Stoics a mere universal essence, as it has been often incorrectly stated. Marcus Aurelius believed firmly in a personal divinity. In book vi., sec. 5, he states: "That intelligent Being that governs the universe has perfect views of His own nature and acts, and of the matter on which He acts."

Any endeavour to criticise this excellent work as it deserves would carry me far beyond the bounds of this survey. The book will, no doubt, affect different readers in different ways, according to their various dispositions and settled convictions; but I think it will recommend itself profoundly to all thinking people who are keenly sensitive to the paramount problems of life and the vital considerations of the morals and happiness of humanity.



## SHAKESPEARE'S "MACBETH"

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PITY and terror are held to inspire the muse of Tragedy, but of these sentiments only the latter dominates this powerful drama. Compassion is banished by the very awfulness of the action; while a constant and overpowering *dread*, both rational and supernatural, is the pervading spirit.

From the opening scene, when weird apparitions cast forth their evil spell, through the harrowing theme of the murder of the king, the unearthly fright at the rising of Banquo's ghost, and the subsequent ghastly situations under the ever-darkening portends of approaching doom, terror reigns supreme; and the awe-struck spectator might rise from such a soul-stirring entertainment echoing the cry of the hero of the play—"I have supped full with horrors." Indeed, in the mastery of terror, through all its varying intensities, the play is unsurpassed, and has hardly an equal within the whole range of dramatic art. To criticise it, therefore, would be useless, if not presumptuous; but what is always open to discussion is the interpretation of Shakespeare's characters—a subject upon which much difference will be found to exist.

The prevailing idea of Macbeth seems to be that of a brave and victorious warrior, a mighty man of valour, who, tempted in an evil hour by the machinations of the Evil One, led astray by the fatal passion of ambition, and

urged onwards by the persistent and malign influence of his wife, usurps the crown by a terrible crime. The vacillation of his ardent spirit in the hour of trial, his reluctance to perform the deed, and his awful forebodings are generally looked upon as evidences of a noble disposition struggling against temptation, and succumbing at last to the instigation of a more determined mind than his own. It is usual to charge most of the blame for King Duncan's murder to Lady Macbeth, who is regarded as her husband's evil genius; the balance of criminal responsibility can then fairly be saddled on to the witches —those emissaries of the Devil; and the murderer himself, who is considered a weak and almost unwilling instrument in their grasp, emerges out of the blood-stained ordeal, not altogether clean-handed, but without any very serious stain on his character.

His subsequent career of treachery and bloodshed is ascribed to the fatal march of events, the inevitable consequences of the first transgression, which precipitated him from one fall into a deeper abyss, and made him more the victim of a cruel fatality than of his own deserts.

This tendency to excuse the successful criminal is not confined to critics of the drama; it is, unfortunately, a weakness of human nature, and is only too apparent in some of the most distinguished of historians. It is the outcome of the popular tendency to hero-worship, of the confounding of *right* with *might*, and of the deplorable leniency towards the errors and vices of the so-called *great* which is cultivated in certain quarters.

Thus the coarsest brutality has found its admirers. Witness Carlyle's eulogy of Frederic William of Prussia; the monster Robespierre has been painted in quite captivating colours, and described as "a thorough gentleman"; even Nero has not been without his whitewashers, and I have read observations concerning the murder of

his mother which insinuated that the unpleasantness of his family relations rendered matricide almost excusable.

Had Macbeth, in a private capacity, enticed a friend, relation, and benefactor into his house, and there murdered him in cold blood for plunder, no voice would ever have been raised in extenuation of so foul a deed; but when the victim is a king, and the object of the assassination a crown, then the transaction assumes quite another complexion; the murderer is transformed into a kingly usurper, and the crime is attributed to ambition—the frailty of a noble mind.

Indeed, some commentators have gone further, and seen in Macbeth the figure of a hero. The learned Doctor Gervinus, in his criticism on the play, wrote enthusiastically:—

Grand, like that Hagen in the *Nibelungen Lied*, he compels admiration even while rising in cruelty; the impress of innate heroism is visible in him to the last, so that the greatness of his manly strength and the might of his resolution almost outweigh and equal the magnitude of his guilt.

It may be interesting to examine how far that verdict is justified by a calm review of the facts.

The Macbeth of history is represented to us, in the chronicle of Holinshed, as a bold, fierce, treacherous, and bad man. By the murder of his cousin, the king, under circumstances of particular atrocity, he succeeded in gaining the throne, which he held for a period of thirteen years. His reign was distinguished at the commencement by vigorous government; but afterwards, giving way to the natural cruelty of his disposition, he committed numerous acts of rapacity and bloodshed, until at last his unbearable tyranny occasioned his downfall. He was defeated and killed by Macduff.

We look in vain for any trait of heroism either in the life or in the death of this man. For heroism implies

something more than cunning and brute courage; it requires some greatness of soul, some nobleness of conduct, some generosity of heart.

Nothing of the sort is apparent in the historical Macbeth. There was nothing chivalrous in his career of blood; not a spark of magnanimity in his whole nature. Now, it is admitted that Shakespeare held very closely to Holinshed's account, adopting all the main incidents of the story, and even appropriating into his dialogue whole pages from the chronicle. The character of Macbeth is drawn with consummate skill, and represents a consummate villain. Like all the great poet's creations, the character is not only wonderfully true to nature, but also in strict keeping with its historical surroundings. The description of the man, put into the mouth of Malcolm, appears a fairly accurate portrait:—

I grant him bloody,  
Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,  
Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin  
That has a name.

On the other hand, to do him simple justice, we must grant him brave. Yet even his bravery is not of an exalted or noble type. He is brave in arms, and gifted with great physical energy; but morally he is a coward. Deeply superstitious, frightened at shadows, "infirm of purpose," dreading exposure, and lacking strength of mind, he is not of the stuff of which heroes are made. In not one instance throughout the play does he exhibit any sincerity of affection or openness of soul; everywhere does he show himself crafty and suspicious. He is a bravo, wielding a dagger in the dark, with a cruelty in his heart, and a lying tongue. He is the typical tyrant of the ancients. Against this unfavourable view of his character may be quoted Lady Macbeth's famous soliloquy:—

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor ; and shalt be  
What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature ;  
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldest be great ;  
Art not without ambition ; but without  
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldest highly,  
That wouldest thou holily ; wouldest not play false,  
And yet wouldest wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,  
That which cries, "Thus thou must do, if thou have it ;  
And that which rather thou dost fear to do  
Than wishest should be undone." Hie thee hither,  
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,  
And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
To have thee crowned withal.....

It has also been contended by many commentators that in Macbeth we trace the rapid deterioration of a noble disposition once launched upon the downward course of crime. The inevitable consequences of his fault urged him to further excesses, debased his better nature, blunted his moral sense, and even eventually deranged his mind, until he has been described as almost bordering on furious insanity. His fate has been held up to us as an awful example of moral retribution.

That such a view is in accordance with the teaching of history, as exemplified in the lives of many usurpers, is not to be denied ; the tyrants of antiquity have generally been depicted in that light. The sovereignty, obtained by fraud and violence, has had to be maintained by fraud and violence ; and the natural consequence of one wrong has ever been to beget other wrongs. But Macbeth's case is hardly to be looked upon as an illustration of the general rule. He was not driven to murder and rapine by the force of circumstances. According to the chronicle, he was able to establish his authority from the first on a firm footing ; indeed, the early part of his

reign has been described as beneficial to the community, for, coming after Duncan's lax and feeble rule, Macbeth's strong arm and rapid action restored peace and prosperity to a distracted country, and were exercised in the cause of order and justice. But the natural viciousness of the usurper soon became apparent, and led him into every species of crime and oppression, until he developed the worst features of a remorseless tyrant. In the play, of course, only a few scenes of his life can be represented; but they are sufficient to establish his claim to be considered a cut-throat of the first order.

The murder of Banquo was a savage and dastardly act; it was not prompted by any reason of State or instinct of self-preservation, but merely by lurking hatred and envious rage.

The weird sisters had predicted that Banquo's issue should reign hereafter; and Macbeth, who was eager enough to accept the oracle when it was favourable to himself, determined to defy and overreach Fate when opposed to his own designs. Then followed the butchery of Lady Macduff and her helpless children, for which no reason can be assigned beyond the fiendish depravity of the tyrant, unless, indeed, he is assumed to have been mad.

The belief in the natural virtue and nobleness of Macbeth's disposition, previous to his temptation and fall, seems to be based on his hesitations and compunction at being led into crime; but I submit that a closer study of his character will show that this apparent reluctance was mostly due to moral cowardice.

It is true that he recoiled from the awful deed, which he had himself conceived; but it was clearly not so much from any conscientious scruples as from fear of consequences, or, as Coleridge remarks, "prudential considerations." His heart failed him at the critical

moment. He had all the murderous intent, but he lacked the nerve to carry it into effect. His wife supplied that want, and, by assuring him of success and furnishing the means of escaping detection, she readily overcame his irresolution.

Both parties appear to have shared equally in the guilt; but it may be said on behalf of Lady Macbeth that, while her husband's career of bloodshed only began with this murder, hers ended there. She is not convicted of complicity in any of his further crimes—indeed, it rather appears that Macbeth kept her in ignorance of his later villainies.

Ambition has been represented as the ruling passion of this play; but I think that judgment needs some qualification. What is ambition? If the mere incentive to selfish greed and personal aggrandisement is to be described by such a high-sounding name, then any common swindler, or depredator of burglarious instincts, might pose as a victim to the noble passion. Ambition must be confined to great actions and exalted motives.

Ambition sits well on the lofty brow of a Cæsar; but does it beseem the infamies of such a villain as Cæsar Borgia? I think not. Had Macbeth, prompted by grand, although sinful, aspirations for kingship, raised the standard of revolt against his lawful sovereign and acquired the throne by conquest, the action might properly be characterised as ambitious; but, as it was, he only worked by stealth and treachery for mere personal ends, and he was base even in his motives.

With Lady Macbeth the case is somewhat different. She was undoubtedly instigated by a violent innate craving for power and grandeur—a raging passion that fired her soul with resistless ardour, and overcame all the better instincts of her nature. For the time being she acted like a fiend, impelled by a single idea; so soon, however,

as the fatal purpose was effected and the much-coveted eminence gained, then the evil impulse died out, and left her quiescent and almost repentant. Moreover, her motive, although bad, was not entirely selfish, as with her husband. She strove on his account as well as upon her own, and only aspired to share his glory.

Both the characters are wicked—eminently wicked; but, if there are degrees in their awful wickedness, then it strikes me that Macbeth is the more eminent of the two, and that he is painted in the blackest colours.

Much controversy has taken place over the supernatural machinery that Shakespeare has introduced into the drama, and differing opinions have been expressed concerning the nature of the "weird sisters"—whether to be considered as ordinary witches, or as Norns (the Scandinavian goddesses of destiny), or as merely spiritual impersonations.

Dr. Johnson has remarked concerning the play: "I know not whether it may not be said in defence of some parts, which now seem improbable, that in Shakespeare's time it was necessary to warn credulity against vain and illusive predictions." For my part, I cannot conceive that any such intention was present in the author's mind. The prevailing idea of supernatural interference with the affairs of men appears to me to be more in accordance with the ancient belief in a controlling fate, ominous and inscrutable, which, when consulted by mortals through augurs or by means of oracles, was never revealed except in enigmatical and mysterious predictions. The cast of the tragedy is antique. A haunting dread of an awful and inflexible destiny pervades it. The relentless Nemesis pursues the criminal, and afflicts him with terrible visions and dark forebodings of his approaching doom. Another characteristic of the heathen idea of fatality is the cruel mockery

which attends its stern decrees. The gods, according to the old mythology, did not lead men to evil, but opened the way for their destruction and then scoffed at them in their fall. Thence the term "the irony of fate." This is quite different to the modern conception of tempting by the devil and moral retribution. Macbeth is represented to us as a thorough fatalist. The predictions of the witches were only the presentiments of his own superstitious mind. His belief in his own destiny was strong, and prompted his worst actions, while it sustained him in a false security. He consulted the oracle of his fate, not the devil's powers of witchcraft. He was not imposed upon by sorcery, but deceived himself. When at last fortune forsook him, and he lost faith in a protecting fate, then his boasted courage forsook him also. With his last despairing words he bitterly cursed the malign spirit which had inveigled him to ruin:

And be these juggling fiends no more believed,  
That palter to us in a double sense;  
And keep the word of promise to our ear,  
And break it to our hope.

Yet that malign spirit was his own. He required no devil from the nether regions to tempt him to evil, for he carried one in his heart. And thus he died, accursed.



## RUSKIN'S "SESAME AND LILIES"

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HEAVEN forbid that we should decry the ideal. Enthusiasm in the cause of humanity has been at all times one of the noblest incentives to great and good actions, and must be reckoned a powerful factor in the history of civilisation.

It may not, indeed, in many instances have resulted in any immediate advantage, but it has nearly always been a true and worthy impulse in the right direction, and productive of ulterior benefit and progress. Therefore, far be it from my intention to disparage the hot zeal and high-flown sentiments of the author of *Sesame and Lilies*. That he is a man of lofty ideals and almost passionate enthusiasm in a good cause will be apparent to everyone who carefully reads even this one small volume of his pen, and it is impossible not to be captivated by the fervour of his imagination, his earnest eloquence, and the exquisite felicity of his style.

Yet there is perhaps room for adverse criticism, although in no unkindly spirit. If we take exception to these lectures, it should be solely on practical grounds. Indeed, if this little book were termed "A Rhapsody on Education" there would be no objection whatever to it, but only words of praise; it is because it professes to be a discourse on a very practical subject that exception may be taken to its flighty and unpractical character.

For the ideal should always be in touch with the real, otherwise it becomes purely visionary and Utopian; even if it soar to high heaven it must start from the lowly earth, and have a useful purpose in view. There is no advantage in drawing a strong bow, to borrow Macaulay's simile, if you shoot at the stars.

Now, the principal objection to Ruskin is that he is too prone to star-gazing, and to directing his shots at those heavenly bodies. The shafts may be keen and brilliant enough, the display of intellectual fireworks dazzling; but the efforts must needs be vain, and the result disappointing.

The ostensible subject-matter of these lectures is the choice of books—"how and what to read"—a most excellent and desirable theme, upon which most reading people are glad to be instructed, and thankful for any practical hints. But we look in vain for any such guidance in the volume under consideration. The author does not condescend to details; he deals almost entirely in abstractions.

In the first place, he would be systematic, and range the countless multitude of books under two great fundamental divisions—the books of the hour and the books of all time. The distinction is not one, I fear, that could be turned to any practical account, for there is no such dividing line in the nature of things. The extremes of these two branches of literature are, indeed, as wide apart as pole from pole; but there is a vast middle space, an immense area of debatable ground, covering many of the most interesting subjects of thought and study, and comprising innumerable works which cannot be brought under any such classification, and upon the respective merits of which opinion is often hopelessly divided.

Who is to decide concerning the permanent character

of most publications? In what are their lasting qualities to be sought? The only safe criterion is time; but we of the present day cannot afford to wait for posterity, and it would be unduly hard on poor authors to be relegated to the distant future—nothing under a couple of centuries would answer—for fame and recompense.

Many books are received with public enthusiasm, and looked upon as "for all time," but forgotten within the year; others creep humbly and slowly into notice, are regarded as mere effusions of the day and of no permanent value, and yet live for ever.

I fear, therefore, that it is with books as with most other things of choice and conduct in our lives—we have to rely to a great extent on our individual good sense and judgment. We have to select for ourselves. We have to form our opinion on books as well as from books. The choice of books is like the choice of companions, and each one must find out for himself what suits him best, and is calculated to afford him the greatest amount of good.

But this is not at all Ruskin's opinion; indeed, he would denounce such a proposition with wrath and indignation. He belongs to a somewhat authoritative school, which inculcates passive obedience before all things, and with which individual opinion is nowhere. "To think" is the privilege of the great and wise—the elect, of whom, of course, he is one; the intellectual rulers of mankind, the master-minds, before whom all the common herd should bow their heads to the dust. Speaking in a very masterful way to his meek audience, the lecturer exclaims: "Unless you are a very singular person, you cannot be said to have any 'thought' at all; you have no materials for them in any serious matter; no right to 'think,' but only to try to learn more

of the facts. Nay, most probably, in all your life (unless, as I said, you are a singular person), you will have no legitimate right to an 'opinion' on any business except that instantly under your hand."

So there we have it ! Rather sweeping, perhaps, and lowering to our self-esteem, but from a high authority. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, unless, perchance, one of you happens to be a *singular* person—which is hardly likely, considering how few of them the age produces—you will please to take back seats, to draw in any pretensions to having ideas of your own, and to subside.

I dare say that most of us would not object to this if we could thereby be relieved of the worry and uncertainty of cogitating on our own account. Who is not glad to secure the services of someone else to work for him ? And how pleasant and acceptable it would be to find a substitute for the trouble of thinking. How delightful to be relieved of all perplexity in matters of doubt, and to find an opinion ready-made on all vexatious questions, merely for the asking !

According to our sanguine author, this can be accomplished readily and surely enough by simple reference to "books of all time." There we can obtain advice gratis, and from the highest sources. Purchase a library, and the difficulty is solved. Would that it were so ! But, alas ! hard as it may be for any one of us to make up his own mind on a pinch, it would prove much harder to have that mind made up for him. I sincerely pity the unfortunate man who endeavours to steer his troubled course through life, to secure a strong faith and resolute purpose, or even to gain peace of mind, merely by reading. That he will fail, and fail miserably, in an atmosphere of disenchantment, may be taken for granted ; for the wise experience of the world, sad to relate, is not to be purchased at that price.

In the first place, the number of counsellors is much too great; secondly, they will generally be found to disagree with one another. There is hardly a grave and essential question for thought and investigation upon which the greatest thinkers of all time are not at variance—often in direct contradiction. May not this be the reason why the most learned of men are often the most unsettled in their opinions, the most wavering in their faith? Small satisfaction, indeed, to pass whole years of our short lives in anxious research, pouring over musty volumes, seeking advice from the mighty dead, and consulting recognised authorities on all points, only to find ourselves in the end lost in a labyrinth of controversy, dazed with changing views, or crushed under the weight of conflicting evidence.

Ruskin does not dwell on this phase of the student's work; but he tells us pathetically: "You will discover that the thoughts even of the wisest are very little more than pertinent questions. To put the difficulty into a clear shape, and exhibit to you the grounds for indecision, that is all they can generally do for you!—and well for them and for us if, indeed, they are able 'to mix the music with our thoughts, and sadden us with heavenly doubts.'"

And is that all? Then the question, blunt and commonplace as it may appear, arises in our minds, whether it is worth while going through so much to get so little. But I differ from Ruskin, both in his sublime ideal of the spiritual influence of books and equally in his fall to the opposite extreme of universal misgiving and nothingness.

I submit, in all humility, that it is not necessary to soar so high or to fall so low. There is a middle course, not altogether strewn with roses, or possessing the "open sesame" to all the king's treasures, but nevertheless

offering good fruit, and capable of salutary results. Books cannot be all-in-all to us; but they may yet be a great deal to us—a help, a benefit, and a consolation. Books will not regenerate the world, nor can they be looked upon as the sovereign remedy for all the ills that flesh is heir to; nor is there any good purpose to be served by indulging in extravagant notions on the subject. The student is not the highest type of man, nor can the bookworm be fairly described as the happiest either. But no sensible person will deny that literature is a great power, both for good and for evil, and that under all conditions of life it may be turned to beneficial account. Our endeavour should be, therefore, to deal with the value of books fairly and truly, and to bring practical discernment to their choice, instead of wild, poetical flights and brilliant metaphors.

With the author's fiery denunciation of the barrenness, the unrighteousness, the meanness, and the all-absorbing selfishness of the world we live in, we may agree, in sorrow and regret. His words are well spoken, although, perhaps, exaggerated in the righteous heat of his passion; for it is a hard saying of his: "It is simply and sternly impossible for the English public, at this moment, to understand any thoughtful writing, so incapable of thought has it become in its insanity of avarice."

Yet when we turn to him for some remedy for these crying evils, some alleviation, however slight, for the miseries of existing societies, with the furious conflict of its opposing interests, the crushing exactions of the rich, the hopeless sufferings of the poor, the vile hypocrisy of conventional existence, what has he to offer? Books; only books! A very mild remedy, indeed, for such a desperate case.

"This book plan," he remarks, "is the easiest and the needfulest, and would prove a considerable tonic to what we call our British Constitution, which has fallen

dropsical of late, and has an evil thirst, an evil hunger, and wants healthier feeding."

But what avails a tonic to the *body politic*, so woefully diseased, so dilapidated, so torn with internal commotions, so rotten at the core?

And if such is the case with our political constitution, what shall we say of the *body social*, which is ten times worse? A "tonic," indeed! As well might you propose pacifying a furious strike with public readings from Plato's dialogues, or softening a usurer's heart with a dose of Shylock from Shakespeare, or prescribing a course of pastoral poetry from an ejected Irish tenant!

This sort of panacea reminds us of an anecdote of one of the ladies of the Court of Louis XIV., who, when hearing the murmurs of a starving crowd outside the palace gates, inquired what the rabble were asking for. "The people are crying for bread," was the answer. "For bread?" exclaimed the sympathetic lady, "for bread? Poor people! Why don't they eat cake?"

The author, at the end of his first lecture, can suggest nothing better for the distress of the nation and the internal evils of society than a nice cake in the shape of public libraries, which should, he thinks, be established in every "considerable city," together with art galleries and museums of natural history; a goodly sop of standard books, to be selected by authority, "their text printed all on leaves of equal size, broad of margin, and divided into pleasant volumes, light in the hand, beautiful and strong, and thorough examples of binders' work."

Well, we may claim in our country to have adopted this book treatment; but with what practical result let experience judge. Nearly every town has its institute and circulating library, and books are cheap enough and accessible enough, in all conscience. This

is an age, I will not say of learning, but of information. Education is no longer what it used to be, or confined to certain classes of the community. It is open to all. Public instruction has been taken in hand by the State, and distributed broadcast throughout the land, and almost as a gift. Plenty of books everywhere! It cannot be from the lack of books or school teaching that crime and sin and misery continue to exist, and even to increase in some quarters, or that gross social and political wrongs remain unredressed.

The spirit must be moved and the heart touched before much moral good can be derived from books; otherwise it is like placing a sumptuous repast before a dyspeptic patient, whose stomach turns at the sight of food. The *menu* may be exquisite; but what avails it if the healthy appetite is wanting? What, for instance, would be the use of a choice library in the mansions of most of our rich men? It might be an embellishment to one of the rooms of a grand house, and the backs of well-bound books would afford a goodly view; but there the benefit would probably end.

The spirit of philosophy cannot, any more than the graces of art, enter into the hearts of a sordid generation, intent on money-making and material prosperity only; and it is doubtful whether, if every householder were presented with Ruskin's own selection of "books for all time," the community, as a whole, would be much the better for it. For, to adopt the sense of the old saying, "you can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

## Philosopher Dick

“‘Philosopher Dick’ deals with two distinct subjects. It presents a most vivid and life-like picture of some of the phases of New Zealand life, as it was some thirty years ago, and it gives a detailed analysis of the evil effects of prolonged solitude on a mind which, though of more than average ability, is well stored with required knowledge, and never, at the worst of times, deprived of the companionship of books, yet had an inward tendency to dreaminess and melancholy. Both subjects are treated in a masterly way. No man who was not at once a scholar and a thinker could create the character of ‘Philosopher Dick’; and, although in quite a different vein, the descriptions of life on a sheep station are no less admirable. The extremely diverse types of men to be met among ‘the hands’ in these days are sketched with great verve, and traits both humorous and pathetic are seized and reproduced unerringly.”—*Westminster Review*.

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